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THE ADVANCE OF THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

THE ADVANCE OF THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

BY
EDWARD J. O'BRIEN
Author of "White Fountains," "Distant Music," "The Forgotten Threshold," etc.

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TO

WALTER EDWIN PECK

Scholar and Friend

PREFATORY NOTE

In these chapters I have attempted a valuation of the American short story rather than a comprehensive history. I have, therefore, been less concerned with individual books than with forces and tendencies, less interested in detailed analysis than in an attempted synthesis. Above all, I have sought to set down an impression rather than to write a textbook. Other writers on the subject have been legitimately preoccupied with technique. My chief interest in writing these pages will be found to lie in realizing, so far as I may, a new form of life.

My debt to predecessors and fellow-workers is great and frequently acknowledged in these pages, but I owe a special word of acknowledgment to my friends John Gould Fletcher and John Cournos for much stimulating converse, while many discussions with my friend Robert Graves have resulted in my adoption of a certain attitude of psychological approach for which, however, he is not to be held responsible. To Sherwood Ander-

son I am indebted for unconscious hints; to Messrs. Harper and Brothers for permission to embody in these pages the substance of my introduction to *Land's End and Other Stories* by Wilbur Daniel Steele; to Francis J. Hannigan for preparing the index and seeing these pages through the press; and to the shade of Joseph Joubert for a motto: "Oh! ye fat geniuses, despise not the lean!"

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

Forest Hill, Oxon, England
October 25, 1922

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THE ADVANCE OF THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

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CHAPTER I

THE SHORT STORY AND AMERICAN LIFE

Readers of Edith Wharton may remember Mrs. Amyot in *The Pelican*,[1] who earned a comfortable livelihood by giving superficial lectures on philosophy and literature to fashionable audiences for her baby's sake. The baby grew up until he was a man of middle age, but she had formed the public habit and always pleaded to good effect the old excuse. It was said of her that "it was her art of transposing second-hand ideas into first-hand emotions that so endeared her to her feminine listeners." I wonder if *The Pelican* may not be regarded as a parable which applies only too accurately to the American short story as we know it to-day. To what extent are our writers endeavoring to practice an art for the baby's sake? They

[1] *The Greater Inclination*, 1899, p. 49.

begin with an intention which may be laudable, but which is certainly commercial, and the material rewards are so great that they continue to write long after the baby has become a man. Art has never flourished in the market-place. "Il faut cultiver notre jardin," says the philosopher, but he does not refer to market-gardening on a large scale.

The situation calls, on the whole, for sympathetic understanding rather than for blame. While it is difficult to resist the pressure of standardization in any aspect of American life, no standardization is more fatal to the spiritual existence of a people than a standardization of the emotions. The value of emotion as a contribution to a national culture is in constant ratio to the freedom which emotion claims to explore by-paths of the mind before settling upon its permanent habitation. Such a freedom has been claimed and won by Hawthorne and Henry James and Sherwood Anderson, but it is denied to most American writers who are not sufficiently robust to avoid the dull pressure of conformity which is materially so well-paid.

In an illuminating article on *The City*, Lewis Mumford has pointed out the deadening result of

this conformity in American city-planning, where streets are laid out like the gridiron of St. Lawrence's martyrdom. "The principal effect," he says, "of the gridiron plan is that every street becomes a thoroughfare, and that every thoroughfare is potentially a commercial street. The tendency towards movement in such a city vastly outweighs the tendency towards settlement. . . . The urban worker escapes the mechanical routine of his daily job only to find an equally mechanical substitute for life and growth and experience in his amusements." [1]

I think that these sentences will provide us with the second parable of which I am in search. The "American Short Story" is traveling down any one of four wide avenues with asphalt sidewalks melting in the blistering sun, and each of these four avenues is dusty with the confusion of a special artistic heresy. First Avenue has become the thoroughfare of literary types, Second Avenue the thoroughfare of local color, Third Avenue, which is more popular, of "plot," and Fourth Avenue, which is most popular of all, leads relentlessly to the surprise ending. There are twenty

[1] *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans*, 1922, pp. 7, 13.

cross streets to the mile along each of these parallel avenues, and every short story is a brisk walk down one street of approach to an avenue, up the avenue to another street, and down the second street to an eminently conclusive brick wall, with occasional pauses on the way to look at the posters outside the moving-picture houses.

The American writer is faintly conscious of this monotonous life, and is restive under the yoke. He realizes that he is expected to renew the familiar round, yet he craves more honorable satisfaction, and more than half believes that he finds it in talking about technique. The truth must be confessed, however, that he is living in a mechanical civilization, and therefore to him technique is a generic term for labor-saving devices to alleviate his own fatigue and that of his readers. Most American universities have established experimental laboratories for evolving these time-saving machines, and in fact the new industry bids fair to become a flourishing branch of mechanical engineering, in which a year's study of graphs and charts leads with appalling certainty to an official certificate of competence to practice the new trade. Short-story writing, which is only justified when it is an art, infrequently rises now-

adays to the lower dignity of a profession, and is for the most part a clever form of trading, in which deceptive tricks are at a high premium.

Upon the few honorable exceptions who are artists I hope to dwell in this volume, and I shall also have occasion to speak of many who practice short story writing with integrity as a profession. The tradesmen call for no comment.

This commercial malady is infectious because a sentimental national optimism is rooted in a purely industrial civilization which worships "efficiency." By "efficiency" is meant quick results and large immediate profits by means of standardization. The nation which still ignores Herman Melville is not likely to have read Samuel Butler, but his suggestion that the machine is developing a mind and may ultimately reduce man to slavery, as man has already enslaved the other animals, is already something of a reality. Our literature tends to have a more and more striking resemblance to a soulless machine with a clever mind, and the American short story more and more suggests that the secret of perpetual motion is being fatally discovered.

This soulless machine is hypnotizing the masses, and reducing the imagination by which they might

evolve into a higher plane of civilization to a least common denominator of sluggish indifference. When this sluggish indifference, which is being educed by the daily press and the motion-picture and the automobile, as well as by the short story and the mechanical play and the jazz band, has sunk into the fens of utter spiritual indifference and apish imitation of the herd, the conquest of the machine will be complete, and the slave and the master will have changed places, as they have changed places in history before. Ere long we shall have to choose, as Henry Adams predicted, between the dynamo and the Virgin, and if we do not make our choice soon, we shall find ourselves spiritually so weak that it will be imposed upon us, for during the past century the machine has far outraced the soul in development, as the last eight years of tragic defeat so sadly testify.

I have suggested that almost every American short story is the product of one or more of four heresies,—the heresy of types, the heresy of local color, the heresy of "plot," and the heresy of the surprise ending. Now every heresy is more or less founded upon a truth, though not always upon a necessary truth. The heresy of types, by which I mean the American passion for drawing charac-

ters who take protective coloration from a monotonous gray background, is based upon the laudable wish to record what is immediately recognizable by every American reader. We are not a people skilled in psychology, and our interest in character is limited either to what is usual or what is quaint. Such an interest affords little scope in literature for a criticism of life, especially if our characterization is aimed to satisfy the idle and unthinking amusement of millions of readers.

If the heresy of types is due to the desire of satisfying a liking for what is usual, the heresy of local color is due to the desire of satisfying an equal liking for what is quaint. A country which is still too young to have a deep sense of the past is not unconscious of the lack, and seeks to supply it hastily with the enthusiastic eagerness of the amateur. Wherever its writers find color they use it, and the brighter and more incongruous the colors happen to be, the better pleased they are. Now local color has a genuine value, but only when the background of the picture does not blind us to the foreground.

We owe the heresy of "plot" to a codification by solemn lawgivers of certain elements in the some-

what meretricious detective stories of Poe and in the more brittle anecdotes of Bret Harte. The body of dogma which has grown up by accretion, if applied to the criticism of Hawthorne or Chekhov or Henry James, would totally reject the stories of these writers, or avoid the difficulty by calling them "sketches" and "novelettes." I state without hesitation that this respect for "plot," or let us rather call it scheming, is the curse of the American short story. I know of a case in which an admirable English writer reduced the textbooks of short-story writing to forty-three rules, and embodied them all in a parody for his own amusement which won serious respect and much applause from the American public as soon as it was published. Artists as serious as Sherwood Anderson and Wilbur Daniel Steele have no knowledge of this elaborate game with its complicated play, as they have confessed to me, but their work is finding its way into the textbooks to be duly codified in turn and to be admired for qualities which it fortunately does not possess.

There is an obvious parallel between this kind of story construction and the modern steel construction of skyscrapers. The great mediæval cathe-

drals rose little by little from the ground upwards. The modern way is to erect a skeleton structure of steel and to fill it in afterwards. Unfortunately, our story-writers seldom try to conceal their girders, and we are called upon to admire the framework at the expense of what that framework should be designed to serve.

The heresy of the surprise ending is derived from "O. Henry," who would seem to have vulgarized a weakness of Aldrich, Stockton, and Bunner. It is now ubiquitous and, like all artificial stimulants, if it is indulged in too freely, it produces a dull reaction. The artist who created *Marjorie Daw* would shudder at the degradation of his achievement in every market-place. Although the surprise ending appears to satisfy the craving for life in a dead atmosphere, the shock it gives us is a galvanic shock, and has a depressing effect afterwards. The story whose effect depends upon a shock of surprise may occasionally be memorable, but we do not return to it for pleasure, and it is not art. The pleasure of art is largely a delight in familiar recognitions.

All these heresies, as I have already suggested, are due to the standardization of American life,

and its feeble attempts at romantic escape. I have been studying the course of the American short story attentively for nine years, and in that period I have seen little advance for the better. We seem impatient of art as if it were a carving of cherry stones, or fearful of it as if it were a menace to democracy. I permit myself to quote Samuel Butler again: "America will have her geniuses, as every other country has, in fact she has already had one in Walt Whitman, but I do not think America is a good place in which to be a genius. A genius can never expect to have a good time anywhere, if he is a genuine article, but America is about the last place in which life will be endurable at all for an inspired writer of any kind." [1]

It would none the less seem to be the duty of the American genius, when he appears, to stay at home and leaven the national lump, if he is strong enough not to succumb to temptation and despair. What proved impossible to Poe and Melville and Whistler may well daunt, however, the doughtiest of fighters. It is the distinction of Sherwood Anderson that to-day he stands alone as a story-teller in carrying on this battle with a measure of success, and signs are not wanting that his influence is

[1] *Note-Books*, 1919, p. 179.

already felt among several of our most promising younger writers.

It has often been remarked that we are indulgent to Americans in our criticism and severe toward foreigners. The point is well-taken, and it argues that we are self-conscious. Our self-consciousness is based, however, on an unhappy sense of inferiority which causes us to be arrogant on some occasions and unduly humble on others. After all, American life is a great adventure and might admit of infinite and subtle variety. There is more than a touch of the Elizabethan in our quest of power, which is sought far less for its own sake than most foreign critics of us seem to realize, and if the American man would link this quest with some form of artistic expression, the result might be surprisingly interesting. As it is, he surrenders his cultural heritage to the American woman, with such effects upon our poetry as well as our fiction as are unknown in any other country. I defy the uninstructed reader to identify the authorship of most contemporary short stories or poems even in our better periodicals, unless he has taken the precaution of verifying the signature. I have made the test with several American critics, and the result is not edifying.

And now I have done with jeremiads. My plea in extenuation is my great faith in the future of American civilization if it makes the right choice, and my belief that it is to America that the world must turn during the next century or two, if it is to find anywhere a satisfactory interpretation of its hopes and fears. My only suggestion is that we must begin to face reality frankly and bravely, and that it is possible to be reticent without sheltering ourselves in a thicket of prudish inhibitions. As Ford Madox Hueffer remarks, "Purity and refinement are no doubt good things, but you cannot expect to sell vegetables if you grow them on sterilized soil in vacuum chambers." [1]

I suspect that the weaknesses in the contemporary short story which I have endeavored to point out are inevitable in a transition period, and that the remedy will appear more clearly if we analyze for a few moments the precise character of this transition and the general direction in which it would appear to point. The World's Fair at Chicago in 1892 will serve as a convenient date to mark the beginning of the change, although the change does not become obvious until after the Spanish-American War and the wave of vague imperialistic feel-

[1] *The Chapbook*, July, 1922, pp. 14-15.

ing which ushered in the twentieth century, and which we shared with England, France and Germany.

Before 1892, American literature was practically homogeneous. It was all of one piece and woven into rough serviceable cloth. It may be characterized briefly as provincial English literature, embodying the aspirations as well as the complacencies of the Anglo-Saxon pioneer. Its virtues are obvious, as the virtues of the pioneer are always obvious: its vitality more dubious, like that of most transplanted shrubs in a new and unfavorable soil. It came into nearly perfect flower in the epic vision and expression of Lincoln and Walt Whitman, and produced rare, but a little stunted, plants of great beauty in Hawthorne and Thoreau. Its finest achievements under happier conditions would have been Poe and Melville, and it is these two men to whom the artist to-day finds that he instinctively turns. When everything depreciatory has been said, it must be confessed that the world offers no better example of a pioneer literature than America has produced, and it is perhaps not necessary to despair of the future with the outraged reactionaries on the one hand or the profoundly pessimistic *intelligentsia* on the other.

Let us endeavor to understand the transition period, and plot out a usable future with the knowledge which we have thus acquired. Holding comminatory services over the tomb of puritanism, or love feasts in anticipation of the barricades, are useless and sentimental critical occupations. It is precisely this failure of our contemporary criticism to guide us along constructive paths which compelled me to sympathize heartily with the American college girl in Florence whom I overheard remarking with indescribable enthusiasm to her companion after gazing silently at the great *Crucifixion* by Fra Angelico in San Marco: "Isn't it immense? Isn't it wonderful? Doesn't it simply remind you of Kipling?"

Such vitality as the American short story could claim before 1892 (and it could rightfully claim a great deal), was nourished by the Anglo-Saxon racial memory and the later experience of conflict with nature while wresting from destiny a new and untamed land. We find the former exemplified in Irving and Hawthorne, and the latter in instances so widely separate as the stories of Bret Harte and Mary E. Wilkins. We find the two combined in the work of the New England regionalist writers, or in that of Hamlin Garland and Charles Egbert Crad-

dock. We find Poe and Melville suffering at the expense of this pioneer life which had no sympathy to waste upon artists. In pioneer societies, the artist must be one of the herd, or he will find himself abandoned by reason of the herd's instinct for protective solidarity against the perils of the new and strange. Pioneering is a partial regression to primitive life, and primitive life is a network of seemingly necessary taboos.

So much for the pioneer period of development which began to decline after the civil war, and to show the need of new blood to modify the fixity of its dull and dusty type. The tide of immigration had already begun to provide this new blood. Many Irish people came to this country in the forties driven by famine, and they were followed as the years went on by others who brought a somewhat crushed, but smoldering, Celtic imagination as their contribution to the American spiritual heritage. Germans began to immigrate in considerable numbers shortly afterwards, but up to the early nineties other races were but sparsely represented in the United States.

The twenty-two years which elapsed between the World's Fair at Chicago and the outbreak of the war in 1914 represent a period, however, in which

the Anglo-Saxon literary and cultural supremacy was profoundly shaken by the influx of vast numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, who brought with them the utmost variety of different racial traditions. The problem of their assimilation and fusion with the Anglo-Saxon body, which realized its hitherto unquestioned leadership to be challenged, was more than a political problem. It was also a cultural and literary problem.

The dominant Anglo-Saxon, who was paradoxically enough Puritan and aristocrat as well, sought and still seeks to subdue the alien cultures to conformity and eventual identity with his own. There is an attitude of patronage about much Anglo-Saxon writing in America during the past generation which is unpleasing and, it must be confessed, unimaginative. The local colorists, especially, who are generally Anglo-Saxon, have reaped a harvest of esteem by their indulgent and usually uncomprehending chronicles of what they regard as alien quaintness.

And yet in these new races, whose coming was inevitable, lie the only hope by which America may achieve not only an individual literature of its

own, but a literature which could be a unique experiment in the history of the world. Moreover, all indications prove that the chief artistic form of such a literature during the fusing generations is likely to be the short story.

The hope and pride of this literature would be its demonstration of the possibility that all the varying and hitherto separate racial traditions of other continents could borrow from each other their richest and noblest memories and experiences, and fuse them into a common eclectic culture purged of national weaknesses and compact of international strength. Such a culture, which would have deep and abiding contacts with all races, if it had a faith and an ideal, could impose that faith and ideal peacefully and almost unconsciously upon the world. The question, therefore, which cannot and will not be banished, is whether the Anglo-Saxon American is to share in such an ideal task, or to wreck it in his passion to remain provincial. If the experiment of fusion is to go on, the chief literary interpretation of the races to one another is certain to be neither in poetry, which the American public either ignores or regards sentimentally, nor in the novel for which we have shown no strik-

ing talent, but in the short story, which is after all our national literary form and almost our discovery.

Such a literature as I have adumbrated would involve no break with the fine traditions of our Anglo-Saxon past. As those traditions were embodied in the toils and sacrifices of spiritual, as well as physical, pioneers, so are the newly-come races also spiritual and physical pioneers, fighting for a new life and a new civilization. Are they to fight against the frozen mold of an effete and provincial culture, or are they to be permitted to act as liberating forces in the same quest for freedom as the founders and builders of the nation? When we consider the rich literary field which Henry James found in the interpretation of England to America and of America to England, who shall set a bound to the literary possibilities of a country which might ultimately interpret all the races of the world to one another? The conceivable orchestration of the theme is stupendous, and its achievement, which is entirely possible in the coming century, would represent a spiritual advance greater than the mechanical advance of the past century. The tragedy of the world which we now endure, is due to the fact that mechanical

progress has far outraced spiritual progress, and the two varying speeds are racking life apart. If we have the faith, and if there is still time, it may be our destiny to reset the balance. A history of our literary achievement in the past hundred years, as measured by the American short story, may make the problem clearer and the path of future progress easier to trace.

CHAPTER II

THE FORERUNNERS—IRVING, AUSTIN, AND OTHERS

THE history of the American short story before Hawthorne and Poe is for the most part of mere academic interest. It need not trouble the general reader very much, and I propose to sketch it very briefly here. In its primitive formlessness, it is at first only faintly distinguishable from the essay and descriptive narrative. Its history is to be read in a succession of dusty annuals of intolerable dullness. The bindings of these annuals, which were issued as gift-books to lie upon the drawing-room tables of people with pretensions to culture, have a certain interest in their tawdry magnificence. But if we except the fact that a part of Hawthorne's early work appeared in these surroundings of melancholy grandeur, it will be safe to dismiss these annuals entirely, as well as the few struggling and short-lived American periodicals published during the first third of the nineteenth century.[1]

[1] See Mitford, M. R. *Stories of American Life by American Authors*, 3 volumes, 1830.

In the writers who contributed to both, we find a certain amount of experiment by trial and error, feebly fumbling toward literary form. Their interest, however, is biological rather than literary. They often attempted to chronicle pioneer life and experience and they showed a laudable interest in American history. But they were usually intolerably melodramatic on the one hand, or sickly with false sentiment on the other. *The Cambridge History of American Literature* will provide the pedantic reader with all the information he is entitled to have, and the bibliographical material it offers is abundant for the sort of research work among the tombs only too frequently encouraged by American universities. Let us hope that its helpfulness will not result in too many new or useless contributions to knowledge.

The only writers to whom there is the slightest need of our paying any careful attention here are Washington Irving and William Austin. Irving presents us at once with a date and a point of departure. The date is 1819, when he published *The Sketch-Book*, and the point of departure is *Rip Van Winkle*, which for every sane and practical purpose is the beginning of our short story history. If we examine *The Sketch-Book* atten-

tively, we shall see that the short story begins by detaching itself from the essay. It is timidly experimental, but the steps of the process are tolerably clear. The process is not unique in America. It is to be observed also in England. In the essays of Addison and Steele and others, and particularly in the de Coverley papers, we find the germ of the modern short story, and if we look closely, I think we shall find that it must have appeared just then in response to an urgent need.

All art demands as a condition of its growth a contagious social expression. In primitive times, this social expression was found in the dance and in song, and developed after a time into the epic poem. In a more sophisticated age, this expression has been found more than once in the drama, a form of communicating and sharing emotion capable of very high development. The drama was the chief literary form of social expression in Elizabethan England, and its brilliant history was chiefly due to the fact that it supplied the biological need of the gregarious animal known as man, by solving the unconscious conflicts of a time that lived dangerously and actively and by receiving in turn from its responsive and sympathetic public

the stimulus and nourishment necessary for its development.

It would be a digression here to trace the history of the decay of the English drama and the eclipse of the adventurous pioneering spirit of the Elizabethans. It is moreover sufficiently familiar to most readers to render such labor unnecessary. But when we come to the writers of the Restoration and of the time of Queen Anne we find that reason and intellectualism, which are isolating qualities of man, in contrast to feeling and imagination, which are social qualities of man, have bred a spirit of disillusion in which the gregarious impulse which tends to knit a society together finds little or no opportunity for expression. Drama is dead, and literature is the formal and chilly expression of a class mind rather than the spontaneous and warm expression of a people's deepest feeling. The disillusion of which I have spoken had frozen the drama into type and situation.

But feeling and imagination cannot be indefinitely suppressed, and social expression had to find a new form. It was soon to find the novel, and the English discovery of this adequate form served to delay the advent of the short story in any

very significant way until it came to England once more from America by way of India. The germ of the short story, however, is to be found in the England of Queen Anne. The need for a new social expression, more or less subconsciously felt, created the personal essay, which endeavored to solve the unconscious conflicts of the time by chronicling the "talk of the town" and by commenting upon it, and which received in return from its responsive and sympathetic coffee-house public the stimulus and nourishment necessary for its development.

Now when you begin to chronicle the "talk of the town," you begin to feel the further need of creating talkers, and if the drama is debarred by the terms of your problem, you quickly find yourself taking a long step forward in the direction of fiction. You create Sir Roger de Coverley and Will Honeycomb and others to do your talking for you. You fumble for a time to find the best method necessary for the adequate achievement of your end, and the chance is very good indeed that you will find yourself writing fiction. The *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, the *Guardian*, and other periodicals had much to do with blazing the path which led to Richardson and Fielding.

In like manner, the American writer found his way to the short story through the essay, and Irving is of very great significance as marking the clearest point of transition. The question may be fairly asked at this juncture: Why did not the essay in America lead to the novel as the characteristic form of American fiction, as it did in England? The answer is, I think, clear. It was partly a matter of temperament, and partly a matter of environment, though there is a necessary connection between the two. By temperament, the American who was a pioneer was impatient and restless. In general, as a writer he could not content himself with a literary form which demanded a long apprenticeship, much exhausting experimentation, and an uncertain public response. In like manner, as a reader, he would not concentrate willingly on a long piece of work, or respond to it with any great degree of sympathy, unless he was more or less vitally implicated in some immediate and pressing problem which it raised. Americans read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but they drew the line at *Moby Dick*. The American's environment was such that neither as a writer nor as a reader did he feel that he could afford the necessary leisure for conceiving and creating a

novel on the one hand, or for reading and digesting it on the other.

To the pioneer, leisure, perhaps of necessity, seems sinful. To devote one's life to literature is to confess oneself a weakling and to be despised. But the short story from a pioneer's point of view has the merit of being brief and of condensing emotion into a moment as it flies. It satisfies his gregariousness without affronting his conscience. It requires no leisure to grasp its point. It requires less leisure on the author's part than the novel to express his feeling. Moreover, it solves his own unconscious conflicts with a greater economy of energy and with greater apparent clarity and force. Its chance of survival and development in a pioneer civilization was infinitely greater than that of the novel, and to this day the short story is our characteristic literary form, and the novels we have produced are for the most part of insignificant literary value.

So much by way of introduction to Washington Irving. We have defined his historical place in the advance of the American short story as its real point of departure. Let us now examine his work more closely, and see how far it is of interest to us here. He was born in New York City in

1783 toward the close of the Revolution, and he died near Tarrytown, New York, in 1859 shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. His father was a Scotchman and a deacon in the Presbyterian church: his mother, an Englishwoman. As a boy, he suffered from the cold and severe discipline of his father, and we know that he had to seek the imaginative sustenance his nature craved by artifice and concealment. Such a boyhood explains the tendency of the man to banish harsh reality from his art. His mother, however, appears to have understood him. At the age of fifteen, he spent a summer holiday wandering alone in the Sleepy Hollow Region, and it is significant that *Rip Van Winkle* is, among other things, a tale of romantic escape from a scold. The Catskills represented such a romantic escape from a home and a harsh father, and the suppressed desires of the boy find fulfillment in the story written later by the man.

Irving had little formal schooling and his health was delicate. He studied law without enthusiasm, broke down physically, and traveled in Europe from 1804 to 1806. Returning home, he was admitted to the bar, but scarcely practiced. Soon after, he suffered severely from the loss of

Matilda Hoffman, whom he had hoped to marry. He never forgot this loss, though indications are not wanting that more than once in later years he had thoughts of marriage. His single life thus offers the second frustration to determine that impulse toward romantic escape which is the fundamental characteristic of his work.

His second sojourn in Europe began in 1815, and lasted for seventeen years, divided chiefly between England, France, and Spain. It is during this period that he published the three books which concern us here: *The Sketch-Book* (1819-20), *Tales of a Traveler* (1824), and *The Alhambra* (1832). He returned to America in 1832 for ten years, was American ambassador to Spain from 1842 to 1846, and spent the last thirteen years of his life in retirement, for the most part, at "Sunnyside," near Tarrytown, New York. His essays, biographies, and histories have no bearing on our subject.

From this brief outline of Irving's life, it will be seen at once that his work does not present such difficult psychological problems as that of Hawthorne or Poe. But we may perceive in his writings one significant fact, I think, which is usually ignored. He was in quiet revolt against the

American life of his time. I do not mean that his life in Europe denationalized him. While living in Spain, his letters show, on the contrary, that he was homesick for America. I mean that he foresaw the coming suppression of spiritual by material values in his own country and sought to stem that tide. Those critics who are actively questioning our own contemporary values, and who are disposed to find fault with him, would have had his sympathetic esteem and coöperation. Strain is not always a sign of intensity, he might have pointed out to them, but with their general thesis he would have had no quarrel. To those who say that Irving had no explicit message, we may reply that he had an implicit ideal. Colonel Newcome has something to tell us as well as Carlyle.

Irving's two best stories are *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and they both appear in *The Sketch-Book*. Coming to these stories after reading the work of his American predecessors, we perceive at once that Irving owes nothing to the style of his fellow-countrymen. The influence, however, of Defoe, Goldsmith, Addison, and Steele are plain, though he has his eye fixed much more directly upon the object than

Addison and Steele. He has Defoe's verisimilitude of manner and Goldsmith's verisimilitude of visual rendering. The influence of Defoe does not appear to have been stressed hitherto, although it is well-known that *Robinson Crusoe* was a favorite book of his boyhood.

He has the "sense and sensibility" of Goldsmith, and also his gift of gentle satire. George Saintsbury has remarked in his *Peace of the Augustans* that Goldsmith is inimitable, and has pointed out that Thackeray, who could write like Steele or like Horace Walpole, to take two very different contemporaries of Goldsmith, never attempted to imitate him. Well, Irving probably did not try to imitate him, but his sensitive and unconscious assimilation of Goldsmith's style, no doubt while reading *The Vicar of Wakefield* over and over again as a boy, accomplished the feat.

In later years, Irving was influenced by his friend Sir Walter Scott, but this influence is to be observed chiefly in the more deliberate direction of his interest toward the historic past, and for our purpose in this study it need not be further discussed, except to point out that it may have helped to determine the subject matter of the stories told in *The Alhambra.*

It has been the fashion of short story critics during the past few years to refer slightingly to *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and to claim that their technique is crude. One critic, for example, whose study of the American short story has been unusually careful and valuable, Professor Baldwin, has pointed out that a writer who was relating the story of *Rip Van Winkle* to-day "would begin with Rip's awakening, keep the action within one day by letting the previous twenty years transpire through Rip's own narrative at the new tavern, and culminate on the main disclosure." [1] We might readily suppose that Euripides would have handled *Hamlet* in a similar manner. Such speculations are not only useless, but actually harmful. It is a necessary, but frequently forgotten, platitude of criticism that we must measure a writer's achievement by what he sets out to do, and govern our appreciation accordingly. We must not judge Irving's technique to be inferior because it is different from that of Kipling, or because it is earlier. Each kind of writing has great merit. The one has ease, and the other intensity. It is, of course, arguable that the ideal short story should have

[1] *American Short Stories*, 1904, p. 8.

both qualities, but the historical fact remains that intensity and ease have not yet been fused into a masterpiece by a short story writer in any language.

Furthermore, the point may be made that Irving's characteristic qualities of restraint and quiet balance have the merit of forestalling any reaction against his subject. There is an unfortunate tendency nowadays, which may perhaps be regarded as an excess of virtue, to value a short story in so far as it gives us a shock of surprise. As I have said before, it is the stories to which we can return again and again with a sense of refreshment and familiar recognition that survive the day for which they were written. By this test *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* will outlast many changing literary fashions.

It is always well to view a writer in the midst of his contemporaries. When we compare Irving's stories with those which other American writers published between 1819 and 1832, we find that it was his sense of humor which saved him from their excesses, and his sense of proportion and balance which led him to fill in what they more or less entirely neglected. It is true that the plots of his two best short stories are

rather tenuous, but the virtuosity of his style confers substance upon that tenuity. He was conscious himself of the fact that his materials were delicate. "My writings may appear light and trifling in our country of philosophers and politicians," he writes to Brevoort on March 3, 1819. "But if they possess merit in the class of literature to which they belong, it is all to which I aspire in the work. I seek only to blow a flute accompaniment in the national concert, and leave others to play the fiddle and French-horn." In this ambition he succeeded perfectly, and the measure of his success is the felicity with which he balances romantic feeling and classic form.

The answer to those who dismiss Irving from American literature as a European man of letters is to point out that he was the first of our writers to furnish us with valuable American folk legends. In *Rip Van Winkle*, for example, he conferred upon the old German tale of the sleeping Friedrich Barbarossa a vividly realized American background, and so transmuted its substance into significant reality. It is now an integral part of our racial memory.

Such a sense of background as Irving possessed is not found elsewhere in our literature, despite its

excessive preoccupation with local color, except in the work of Hawthorne and Henry James. The typical American romantic, whether he is an artist or a business man, finds the setting of his dream landscape in the future. Washington Irving and Henry James found it in their "sense of the past." It is pardonable for us to picture them strolling arm in arm through the Elysian fields, conversing upon the England both men loved. If there is unconscious comedy in this picture, I do not think that Irving supplies it. I, for one, should be happy listening to their leisurely dialogue.

Irving's example was followed without distinction by various friends and disciples in America, and more happily in England by Mary Russell Mitford. The detailed history of his influence is of interest to none but the specialist. A few names, however, call for some passing comment before I proceed to discuss the work of Hawthorne, Melville and Poe.

John Pendleton Kennedy (1795-1870), who was a friend of Irving, reveals in his writings a graceful facility which rises at times to a certain quiet level of careful characterization. The episodic shetches of *Swallow Barn* (1832), which was published in the same year as *The Alhambra,*

chronicle the uneventful life of a Virginia plantation, and show, by no means to their discredit, the influence of *The Sketch-Book* and *Bracebridge Hall* upon their author. Kennedy had humor and a seeing eye, and three years later justified in a measure the promise of these sketches by his novel of the Revolution, *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, which still finds readers.

The same tone of quiet urbanity caught from Irving is to be found in the work of James Hall (1793-1868), whose best book is *The Wilderness and the War Path* (1846). His stories and sketches date from 1820, and chronicle the life of the West in a faithful pedestrian style. The curious may sample it in *The French Village* (1829), which Professor Baldwin prints with some well-deserved cutting in his collection of *American Short Stories*.[1] Hall also related tales of the supernatural with an air of mild indulgence. His frequent defects, which are characteristic of the time, are false sentiments and rhetorical wordiness.

Professor Baldwin also reprints in wisely abbreviated form[2] *The Inroad of the Navajo* by

[1] pp. 99-112.
[2] pp. 115-127.

Albert Pike (1809-1891) who published *Prose Sketches and Poems Written in the Western Country* in 1834, and who is better known perhaps for his books on freemasonry. Pike's sketches are of some descriptive interest. He had a considerable sense of background, but little structural ability. Some critics profess to see in his work a foreshadowing of Cable's subtlety. This is inquiring too curiously. He is much too direct and eager, and has not caught the spirit of Creole languor. We feel, moreover, that he is a traveler who records what is strange around him rather than a loving chronicler of a vanishing past.

Of Nathaniel P. Willis (1806-1867), much was written in his own day, but he is hardly a legend in ours. An adept of sentimental Byronism, he set a fashion, and his bad stories and worse rhymes were widely imitated. To us he appears as a prophetic parody of Oscar Wilde. His historical importance as a fatal influence upon his time compels me to mention him here, and if he must be read at all, the least unfavorable opinion of him will probably be formed by glancing at *Two Buckets in a Well*, which is reprinted in the

fourth volume of Scribner's *Stories by American Authors.*[1]

Caroline M. S. Kirkland (1801-1864) is rather less depressing. Her style descends from Irving by way of Miss Mitford, and was admired by Poe. The stories in *Western Clearings* (1846) are weak in structure, but the characterization is frequently not bad, and her use of dialect convinces us upon the whole, where that of her contemporaries is usually absurd. Moreover, she is satisfied to hint, while they remorselessly tell us everything. A pruned version of *The Bee-Tree* reprinted by Professor Baldwin,[2] and *The Schoolmaster's Progress* reprinted by Alexander Jessup in *The Best American Humorous Short Stories*[3] offer the reader an opportunity to form his own judgment. One might find worse reading upon a rainy day.

It must be confessed that a prolonged study of these five writers would be a dreary task, but there is one little-known story-teller of considerable skill of whom I have postponed speaking until now at the risk of chronological confusion, because

[1] pp. 57-82.
[2] pp. 195-210.
[3] pp. 18-33.

he will serve as an excellent point of transition to our consideration of Hawthorne.

William Austin was born in Lunenburg, Massachusetts in 1778, graduated from Harvard University, spent a couple of years in England where he mingled freely in literary and political circles, practiced law upon his return, wrote in his leisure moments a number of admirable short stories which appeared in the magazines and annuals of the time, and died in Boston in 1841. A selection from his stories was published in 1890, and has long been out of print. His best story *Peter Rugg, the Missing Man* was reissued with an introduction by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1910, but a collected edition of his tales is the first of the three desiderata which I shall have occasion to mention in the course of this book, in the hope that three important but forgotten contributions to American literature may be recovered from the past.

Peter Rugg, the Missing Man, as we now have it, is in two parts. The first part appeared in the New England *Galaxy* on September 10, 1824. A supplement to the tale was published seventeen years later in *The Boston Book*. It has the same legendary value as *Rip Van Winkle* and *The*

Legend of Sleepy Hollow, and yet by some ill-fortune it has never become a familiar part of our literary memory. In the psychological subtlety of its craftsmanship, it points the way to Hawthorne. That Hawthorne knew and admired the story, which appeared while he was an undergraduate at Bowdoin College, is proven by the fact that he makes an allusion to it in the climax of his sketch, *A Virtuoso's Collection* in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. This fact has been pointed out by more than one critic previously. A fact of equal interest, which has not hitherto been observed, is that there is a marked parallelism in situation between *Peter Rugg* and Edward Everett Hale's *The Man Without a Country*.

The narrative is set in an atmosphere of romantic twilight, but the realization of that atmosphere is vivid and continually present to the reader. Moreover the emphasis is psychological, and this is a new quality in American story-telling which marks an important milestone. In both respects, the effect upon Hawthorne's method can be traced. Colonel Higginson has pointed out further parallels. Austin laid the scene of his story at a time midway between the colonial and the modern period, and also utilized appropriate historic and

social details in a manner characteristic of Hawthorne. Colonel Higginson also believed that Austin's manner of putting the reader into possession of two or three possible interpretations of an event was noted and employed by Hawthorne, but this characteristic is to be found in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* as well. What is certain is that both writers had precisely the same method of evocation by the cunning use of shadows, and half-lights.

Professor Baldwin, who has reprinted the tale,[1] feels that it is *"a short story manqué."* While Austin's cumulative effect is gained by a series of foreshadowings, each of which involves a different speaker, this seems to me a wise and deliberate choice, as it emphasizes the passage of time in the working out of Peter Rugg's punishment, and enables us to picture the situation from a number of significant angles. Conrad has familiarized us with this method in our own day. That the punishment of Peter Rugg should be brought to an end at last, and that an unknown voice should summarize the moral of the piece may seem to some readers crude, but by his previous method of surmise, the author has cunningly pre-

[1] *American Short Stories*, 1904, pp. 61-95.

pared us for this coda, which quietly rounds off the piece. Hawthorne noted the effect of this unknown figure passing judgment, and employed it later in *The Gray Champion* and in *Howe's Masquerade.*

The most memorable among Austin's other stories are *The Late Joseph Natterstrom* (1831) and *The Man with the Cloaks* (1836). His genuine, if slender, gift entitles him to rank as a minor classic of American literature.

CHAPTER III

HAWTHORNE AND MELVILLE

Few writers whose life was so uneventful as that of Nathaniel Hawthorne have left more biographical materials of their work for the critic. Of the many paradoxes which his life and writings reveal, none is more remarkable than the fact that a man whose shyness held him exceptionally aloof from men should have so frankly set down his dreams and hopes, his frustrations and disillusions, and shown no repugnance to their publication during his own lifetime. To the psychologist these materials, as well as the diaries and other records published posthumously by his son and others, are invaluable, and offer an unusual opportunity, of which little advantage has as yet been taken, to trace the process of crystallization in a fine artist's work, and the resolution in literature of the personal conflicts in an exceptionally sensitive nature. At some later time, I should like to study these materials at greater length. For the present, I must content myself

with calling attention to a few hitherto unstressed biographical matters before passing on to a valuation of Hawthorne's contribution to the American short story.

He was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on July 4, 1804. Four years later his father died, and his mother, who was then only twenty-seven years of age, began a life of seclusion and mourning in her room, and adhered to it so strictly that she partook of her meals apart from her children until her death forty years later. "It was as if there were a ghost in the house," says Mr. Woodberry, Hawthorne's not unsympathetic biographer. The novelist's boyhood was sickly, though not without malingering, and debarred from healthy physical enjoyment by the anxieties of his mother, his energies were absorbed by desultory reading. When he was fourteen, he passed a year in the Maine wilderness to which his family had moved, and it was here, he tells us, that his love of solitude was first determined. We know that he absorbed at this time the works of Bunyan, Scott, and Rousseau, as well as the novels of Godwin and Hogg's tales. It is not inquiring too closely to observe that distinct traces of all these writers colored his ideas, if they had little influence upon

his style. Bunyan would arouse his Puritan conscience, Scott his feeling for an historic past, Rousseau his spiritual nostalgia, Godwin his wistful sense of perfectibility, and Hogg his instinct for setting ordinary life against strange incredible backgrounds.

The chief biographical clue to his work for the first thirty-three years of his life is his strange relation to his mother. Such utter subordination to a morbid grief, which made Hawthorne content to act as the substitute and spiritual simulacrum of his father, could not readily be conceived as possible outside of New England. The psychoanalyst is only too ready to find such instances where they do not exist, but here is an example ready to his hand.

Before entering Bowdoin in 1821, we find him writing to his mother on March 13: "I am quite reconciled to going to college, since I am to spend the vacations with you," [1] and later on June 19 of the same year: "If you remove to Salem, I shall have no mother to return to during the summer vacations, and the expense will be too great for me to come to Salem. If you remain

[1] Hawthorne, J. *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife*, 1884, i. 107.

at Raymond, think how delightfully the time will pass, with all your children round you, shut out from the world, and nothing to disturb us. It will be a second Garden of Eden." [1]

During his four years at college, he is reported to have been reticent and reserved, and upon his graduation he returned to Salem, where his mother was then living, and followed her example without any apparent consciousness of self-sacrifice by retiring to an attic room for twelve years and living a life of almost complete seclusion. The only break in this monotony was a sea bath shortly after sunrise on summer mornings before the town was astir, and a short walk alone after dusk. He received no visitors, but took short holidays in the summer of which very little is known.

We are able to trace signs of increasing melancholia as the years went by, and a passage from his *English Note-Books* (Christmas, 1854) is significant. "My early life was perhaps a good preparation for the declining half of life; it having been such a blank that any hereafter would compare favorably with it. For a long, long while, I have occasionally been visited with a singular dream; and I have an impression that I have

[1] Woodberry. Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1902, p. 17.

dreamed it ever since I have been in England. It is, that I am still at college, or sometimes even at school—and there is a sense that I have been there unconscionably long, and have quite failed to make such progress as my contemporaries have done; and I seem to meet some of them with a feeling of shame and depression that broods over me as I think of it, even when awake. This dream, recurring all through these twenty or thirty years, must be one of the effects of that heavy seclusion in which I shut myself up for twelve years after leaving college, when everybody moved onward and left me behind. How strange that it should come now, when I may call myself famous and prosperous!—when I am happy too."

It does not require much reading between the lines here to show that during this period of seclusion, Hawthorne was eating his heart out fretting for fame and a release from poverty, and that his life with his mother, whose ally in the family he was, served to bar him from such prospects most effectually. The Salem of those days, living with faded gentility on its memories as a decaying seaport, was a fit setting for such a life.

We know that his sister Elizabeth was jealous of him, though her jealousy was rooted in a queer

loyalty to the family as a whole. She wrote afterwards: "We were in those days almost absolutely obedient to him." [1] His mother's abstract passion of dusty grief imposed its will upon them all, and he was its instrument. We find that abstract passion later symbolized in *The Birthmark* and elsewhere, though I suspect that Hawthorne was unconscious of his personal implications.

Had he not met and married Sophia Peabody, it is doubtful whether he would have found himself as a writer or had the courage to struggle out of his obscurity. We should have had *Twice-Told Tales* and perhaps a few other sketches, but not the novels and the more profoundly psychological short stories. His wife rescued him from paralysis of the will, and by half-sheltering and half-encouraging him shaped his purpose to adequate self-fulfillment. It is curious to note that years before she met him, she had written but not sent him a letter asking how he knew that "sensitive natures are especially apt to be malicious." [2]

The drama of courtship has not been completely disclosed. We know that the engagement was kept a close secret for three years, in the belief on

[1] J. Hawthorne. i. 124.
[2] Julian Hawthorne. i. 178.

Hawthorne's part that knowledge of it would be such a blow to his mother as to endanger her life. We also know that his sister Elizabeth instilled and encouraged this idea, and the effect of these inner years of conflict can be traced by the careful critic in much of Hawthorne's most significant later work. In a letter to Sophia Peabody dated May 26, 1839, he writes: "I have been asleep; and I dreamed that I had been sleeping a whole year in the open air, and that while I slept, the grass grew around me. It seemed, in my dream, that the bed-clothes were spread beneath me; and when I awoke (in my dream) I snatched them up, and the earth under them looked black, as if it had been burnt, —a square place, exactly the size of the bed-clothes. Yet there were grass and herbage scattered over this burnt space, looking as fresh and bright and dewy as if the summer rain and the summer sun had been cherishing them all the time. Interpret this for me; but do not draw any somber omens from it. What is signified by my nap of a whole year (it made me grieve to think that I had lost so much of eternity)?—and what was the fire that blasted the spot of earth which I occupied, while the grass flourished all around?—and what comfort am I to draw from the fresh herbage amid

the burnt space? But it is a silly dream, and you cannot expound any sense out of it." [1] Set these words beside the following sentence from his preface to *The Snow Image*, written in 1851: "I sat down by the wayside of life, like a man under enchantment, and a shrubbery sprung up around me, and the bushes grew to be saplings, and the saplings became trees, until no exit appeared possible, through the entangling depths of my obscurity." The tragedy is only too plain, and Hawthorne has analyzed it himself unconsciously in the tale of *Wakefield*, while indicative references in *The Ambitious Guest* and other stories are full of self-revelation.

When his mother was nearing her end, he wrote in his journal after sitting by her bedside: "I looked at my poor dying mother, and seemed to see the whole of human existence at once, standing in the dusty midst of it." [2] After her death, this sense was transferred little by little until it centered in his wife, and the quickening effect of this upon

[1] Julian Hawthorne. i. 205-6. My friend Robert Graves calls my attention to the symbolism of Hawthorne's title, *Tanglewood Tales*, in connection with this dream, and suggests that there is a subconscious association in all this imagery with the word "hawthorn."

[2] Julian Hawthorne i. 348.

his art achieved masterpieces, but the old seal remained upon them, though transmitted into new forms.

The marriage took place in 1842, and Hawthorne's removal to the Old Manse at Concord broke the family spell. For the last twenty-two years of his life, dates and outward events signify little. He passed four years in Concord, three years in the Salem Custom House, and had various abodes in New England from 1849 to 1853, including a sojourn in the Berkshires, where he was a somewhat uncomprehending neighbor of Herman Melville. His college classmate, President Pierce, appointed him American Consul at Liverpool, and he held the post for four years, following which he lived in Italy from 1857 to 1860. The last four years were passed in Concord, and he died on May 18, 1864. The only other dates of interest to us are those of his collected stories. The two series of *Twice-Told Tales* appeared in 1837 and 1842 respectively, *Mosses from an Old Manse* in 1846 and *The Snow-Image* in 1852. *Tanglewood Tales* and the other books for children hardly belong to the history of the short story, and the few short sketches collected after his death are of no very great value.

Hawthorne has told us more about his own work than any American story-teller except Henry James. As I have previously suggested, his prefaces, his journals, his note-books, and his letters provide a mass of illustrative material which may be utilized for technical criticism. I propose to make little direct use of this material now, but there are two or three passages in the prefaces which shed light upon Hawthorne's own view of his work. "No author," he says in the preface to *The Marble Faun*, "can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, as is happily the case with my dear native land." There is a touch of malicious irony in this last phrase which should not pass unheeded, although too much must not be made of it. What is important in this remark is the clue which it gives us to account for Hawthorne's romantic escape inward. Barred from the outer romance, he sought and found release by plunging into the arena of the mind. The confession is implicit in his preface to *Twice-Told Tales:* "The book requires to be read in the clear brown twilight atmosphere in which it was

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written; if opened in the sunshine it is apt to look exceedingly like a volume of blank pages." Finally, to qualify the matter, Hawthorne recommends discretion in his preface to *The House of the Seven Gables:* "If he (the artist) thinks fit, . . . he may so arrange his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially to mingle the marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public."

In his early days he thought that he "could imagine all feelings, all passions, and states of the heart and mind."[1] After his marriage, he came to realize that the artist must draw on experience to feed his imagination. We know that both he and his wife had a very active dream life, and as dreams were a continuous living experience to him, he could sublimate their conflict in his art. Over and over again in his note-books and letters we find references to dreams, and I hope at some future time to trace the correspon-

[1] Hawthorne, Julian. i. 92.

dences between them and his stories. That he was conscious of these transpositions is clear. "To write a dream which shall resemble the real course of a dream, with all its inconsistency, its strange transformations, which are all taken as a matter of course; its eccentricities and aimlessness,—with nevertheless a leading idea running through the whole. Up to this old age of the world, no such thing has ever been written." [1] This note for a story, and many others like it, illustrate his preoccupation with the theme.

If Hawthorne sees life as a dream, it is a musical dream, and his prose has beautiful fugues played upon the inner reëchoing tones of what his imagination presented to him. The vision in the dream has a double quality. First we find the outward fact rendered discreetly with a certain reticence. Behind this outward fact lies the transmuted reality of which that fact has been used as a symbol. In every instance, there has been a conflict, and we become spectators of the scene at the moment when that conflict, usually between good and evil, has been resolved.

I suspect that Hawthorne more than half worshipped Blake's God who was Milton's Satan. At

[1] Hawthorne, Julian. i. 488.

any rate, the Puritan God of his ancestors was in conflict with his own ideal, though he is scrupulous in giving him more than his due. We can easily perceive that his transcendentalism was not absolute, like that of Emerson, but relative, and that his attitude is pragmatic. He has no overweening reverence, though he has great respect, for moral codes as they are, and in much of his work we find the attitude of the Nietzschean superman, who would pass beyond good and evil, faintly patterned like fading tracery breathed upon a winter pane. If the reader will turn to *Endicott and the Red Cross,* for instance, he will find more than one example of it.

Hawthorne obviously qualifies very greatly his acceptance of the Emersonian doctrine of compensation, and far from having the morbid sense of sin with which he is usually credited, regards even what the theologians term mortal sin as a form of education by which we are enabled to transcend life. Here again there is a Nietzschean implication. He studies sin like a scientist, and seems to anticipate the modern scientific technique of plotting out a curve from observed data and of inferring a future course from a study of the path pursued by the past moving toward the present,

much as Henry Adams was to suggest in our own time.

He inherits from Irving the essayist's attitude. After him, no important story-teller has it. Hawthorne is the last, because Poe was to determine, for better or for worse, the technical grooves in which the short story was to move in the future. His great advance upon Irving was his discovery of the subjective method for psychological fiction. Irving had dealt with manners, and Poe was to deal with passions. Hawthorne was solely preoccupied with the drama of conscience. Regarding him from our present standpoint, the discovery may seem commonplace enough, but it was new and almost entirely untried when he published the first series of *Twice-Told Tales*.

Like Poe, Hawthorne is a scientist of the mind, dissecting motive. Unlike Poe, his eye is always upon the moral values, but he keeps them subdued to his atmospheric background, and he is dispassionate in his presentation of them. Amiel and Senancour are the nearest parallels, and if he had not married and left the old attic-room in Salem, we may suppose that he would have left us journals similar to theirs, and little else. As it was, he profited by his early seclusion in so far as it taught

him how to isolate action and motive, and to make his men and women stand out against a clouded eternal sky. In a household where conversation must have been limited, words also came to have a rare personal quality for him, and to become charged with significance, as if they had separate emotions of their own, and could evoke by suggestion great elemental powers.

This quality of evocation is wedded to a subtle sense of rhythm and movement, in which force is not often sacrificed to charm, and charm is everywhere present. The elaborately interwoven rhythms are admirably sustained, and there is an even power in them which achieves gradually increasing momentum. The power is spiritual, and its texture has its warp and woof in the contrast between the mental complexity of New England puritanism, and its outward monotony of daily event. Hawthorne would conceal this complexity of pattern, and the effort called successfully for a masterly power of suggestive implication for which the necessary symbols were by no means immediately at hand. That he found them we know, although we are sometimes conscious of his effort and realize that he has the common defect of the

metaphysical Caroline poets, an occasional love of conceits for their own sake. Had he lived in England during the first half of the seventeenth century, he would have been a close associate, though hardly perhaps a disciple, of Donne.

The life he pictures is most frequently one in which we suffer for the sins of our ancestors, and he would almost seem to value suffering as the philosopher's stone. He felt evil and profited by the knowledge without paying the usual spiritual price for his experience, as most unhappy mortals are compelled to do. He was, in fact, a connoisseur rather than an adept of life. To him outward events are strange and restless allegories of an inner world across the borderland of living, about which he is passionately curious. As Arthur Ransome has admirably said, "Hawthorne's finest stories are a Dance of Death, in which Death is no mere end of a blind alley, but a dividing of the ways. Those dim people he found in his own soul are important to us by their chances of salvation or damnation. Their feet

> 'Are in the world as on a tight-rope slung,
> Over the gape and hunger of Hell.' [1]

[1] From a poem by Lascelles Abercrombie.

. . . The fortunes of Hawthorne's characters are shaping for Eternity." [1]

It is true that he was content with simple nutriment and ascetic in his choice of material. He established a kind of harmony between himself and the sterile complacency of New England at the expense of foregoing the richer experiences whose acceptance made Herman Melville the greater, though still the less popular, writer. The fact is that Hawthorne was limited to a degree by his New England conscience. We find him interested in texture rather than in strain, and suspect that lofty and passionate emotions would have exhausted his powers of resistance. He was a consummate etcher rather than a master of dynamic line. If we examine his work closely, we find that he seldom draws character in the round, but emphasizes one aspect at the expense of others. His tendency is to draw types rather than individuals, and he frequently depends upon the twilight atmosphere and a certain processional dignity of manner to obscure the defect. It is almost as if he were a poet *manqué*, overshadowed in his shyness by Longfellow, Lowell, and other inferiors, as Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville were also

[1] *A History of Story-Telling*, 1909, p. 263.

overshadowed. New England does not always recognize prophets and poets in its midst.

The chief subject of Hawthorne's chronicle is the Puritanism that was dying in New England in his own day and that is dead now. He foreshadows the sterile and inbred New England life of our time with its record of lonely hill farms, brooding spinsters, and degeneracy. His sensitivity rendered him acutely conscious of this process of decay amid whose autumn pageantry he loved to linger, and his family life before his marriage must have brought it significantly, though not unkindly, home. Even Barrett Wendell, to whom New England was America, wrote: "To him Puritanism was no longer a motive of life; in final ripeness it had become a motive of art. When any human impulse has thus ripened, we may generally conclude it historically a thing of the past." [1]

The study of Hawthorne which Henry James contributed as a young man to the English Men of Letters Series is perhaps chiefly valuable as a key to Henry James, though it contains much subtle and considered appreciative criticism. Frequent allusions, however, have been made by later commentators to the charge of provincialism which he makes

[1] *A Literary History of America,* 1901, p. 433.

against Hawthorne, and a word on the subject is perhaps not out of place here. The charge has truth in it, but hardly valuable truth. We know that Hawthorne shrank from nude sculpture and painting, for example, while he was in Italy, and we recognize in this attitude an element of fear which was a survival of his Puritan ancestry. On the other hand, the more important characteristic is worth pointing out that, after all, he was pagan, in the good sense of the word with which Pater has familiarized us, in his disinterestedness and charity as a spiritual chronicler, and that in this respect, which is the cardinal one, he revealed no provincial narrowness. His outward manner may be provincial sometimes: his spiritual attitude is never provincial.

The touchstones of provinciality, after all, in an American writer of fiction are complacency and an excessive fondness for dragging in local color. Hawthorne is not complacent and, were he writing today, no story-teller would have been less seduced by the local color heresy.

The other charge which has been brought against him frequently is that he had a morbid conscience. One need only adduce the fact that a man with a morbid conscience could not have possessed Haw-

thorne's artistic poise. Here a distinction must be made. His conscience was unusually sensitive, but it was not unhealthy. It is true that his Puritan ancestors had an acute sense of sin as the most real fact of life. Hawthorne did not, but he recognized its basic importance in their scheme of things, and its value as a subject for his own entirely detached art. From the circumstances of his early life, we should be prepared to find him morbid, but his letters and the reports of his friends offer little support to our expectations. Hawthorne's sensibilities may have been morbid, if we are to consider hyperæsthesia as necessarily morbid, but his conscience was not, except in so far as we may limit the word to his artistic conscience. There was a tendency, as we know, to mental sickness in his environment, but always in his work, and usually in his later life, he escapes from the danger by means of triumphant artistic sublimation. Henry James has remarked that "the duskiest flowers of his invention sprang straight from the soil of his happiest days." [1]

To sum up, we may regard Hawthorne's work as the ripe fulfillment of all that was best in New England Puritanism, and may find the secret of his

[1] *Hawthorne*, 1879, p. 99.

art in the sublimation not only of his own shadowy spiritual conflicts but of the distilled essence of his ancestors' dreams and hopes. He is the first and best psychologist in American fiction, and illumines dark mysteries with something of Rembrandt's vision and hopes. The conditions were all against him, yet he molded them to his purpose, and in his special province he has been scarcely equaled since and never surpassed.

The contributions of Herman Melville (1819-1891) to the short story are little known and secondary to his novels, but they are eminently worthy of knowledge. They consist of *The Town-Ho's Story in Moby Dick*[1] (1851), *The Piazza Tales* (1856), and some uncollected contributions to periodicals. *The Piazza Tales* have never been reprinted, and it is very difficult to find them outside of a few American public libraries. *The Town-Ho's Story*, which is inferior to some of them, is readily accessible, however. Melville, who ranks with Hawthorne and Whitman, if indeed he is not the greatest writer America has yet produced, has suffered from shameful neglect, and his best work, which is to be found in the *Piazza Tales* and *Pierre* and *Mardi* as well as in *Moby*

[1] Chapter LIV.

Dick, is ignored entirely by our literary Brahmins. Until his masterpieces are procurable, it is useless to deal with them critically.[1] But those who can obtain access to *The Piazza Tales* will not easily forget *Bartlemy the Scrivener*, *The Encantadas*, and *Benito Cereno*. America scorned him in his lifetime and scorns him now to its shame, for it shows that we do not deserve a great man. Raymond Weaver in his life of Melville tells us that there exists a letter to Melville from the editor of *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* refusing a story (unpublished to this day!) for fear of "offending the religious sensibilities of the public and the Congregation of Grace Church." He is one of the greatest visionary artists the world has had since William Blake, yet most of us who discourse upon the technique of O. Henry have never heard of him. "Mad naked Blake" and he among our noblest prophets, but we patronized both and shall probably continue to regard Melville amiably, if we know him at all, as a writer of odd, but worthy sea stories for the young.

In one of his stories, he has written his own epitaph, and in the following words from *Bartlemy*

[1] A limited and very expensive subscription edition is being issued in England and America.

the Scrivener, I leave him to the conscience of the American public.

"The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. 'His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?'

" 'Lives without dining,' said I, and closed the eyes.

" 'Eh!—He's asleep, ain't he?'

" 'With kings and counselors,' murmured I."

CHAPTER IV

POE

THERE is an arresting passage in the journals of the Goncourts which is prophetic when we regard it from the standpoint of the years that have elapsed since it was written. "Poe, une littérature nouvelle, la littérature du vingtième siècle: le miraculeux scientifique, la fabulation par A + B, une littérature à la fois monomaniaque et mathématique. De l'imagination à coup d'analyse, Zadig juge d'instruction, Cyrano de Bergerac élève d'Arago. Et les choses prenant un rôle plus grand que les êtres,—et l'amour, l'amour déjà un peu amoindri dans l'œuvre de Balzac par l'argent,—l'amour cédant sa place à d'autres sources d'intérêt; enfin le roman de l'avenir appelé à faire plus l'histoire des chose qui se passent dans la cervelle de l'humanité que des choses qui se passent dans son cœur." [1] These lines were penned in 1856.

"The literature of the twentieth century: the

[1] i. 137.

scientific miraculous. . . . Things assuming a more important rôle than people . . . the fiction of the future ordained to chronicle what transpires in the brain of humanity rather than what transpires in its heart." Such phrases as these awake only too familiar an echo. Set beside them the following words of Remy de Gourmont: "Poe est un Amérian bien plus représentatif de l'Amèrique qu' Emerson ou Walt Whitman. Son esprit a des côté pratiques. Dénué de littérature, il eût été un étonnant homme d'affaires, un 'lanceur' de premier ordre." [1] Of how many later American writers might it not be said that "stripped of their literary clothing, they would have been remarkable business men, promoters in the highest rank of success."

It would be a fascinating problem to unravel precisely how the artist who dedicated his *Eureka* "to those who feel rather than to those who think" should have attracted and influenced later writers so profoundly by his rationalizing logic rather than by his indubitably great imaginative powers.

He was born in Boston on January 19, 1809. His parents were traveling players, whose livelihood was precarious. We know that his father

[1] *Promenades littéraires*, 1904, i. 381.

was intemperate as well as impulsive, and the histrionic wanderings of both his father and his mother must have led to an experience full of nervous excitement and risk. Both died of consumption when Poe was three years old, and the inheritance which they left him was a source of struggle to him until his death. He was adopted by John Allan of Richmond, Virginia, under whose protection he lived until 1827. He seems to have been petted and spoiled by Allan's first wife who was childless. From 1815 to 1820, he was at school in London, after which he returned to Richmond. We may picture a lonely boy, proud, haughty, and quick-tempered, but generous and hungry for affection. When Mrs. Stannard, the mother of a boy friend, who had been kind to him died, the youth of fifteen is recorded to have kept long night watches of passionate grief over her grave.

Poe had a breach with his foster father in 1824. Allan's wife had died, and he married again. The adulation of Allan's first wife gave place to coldness in his second wife. The breach was to widen fatally later, but in 1826 Allan sent him to the University of Virginia. He was impetuous and perhaps erratic as a student there. He con-

tracted gambling debts of which Allan disapproved, and was obliged to leave college in the following year. Before entering the University of Virginia, he had fallen in love and become engaged to Sarah Elmira Royster, but she broke off the engagement. Poe seems to have remembered her always.

After leaving the University of Virginia, Allan gave him a clerkship in Richmond, but Poe ran away early in 1827. We gather that he went to Boston and entered the army under an assumed name. His discharge was purchased in 1829, and after a period of waiting, he was appointed to a vacancy in West Point in 1830, from which he was expelled in the following year. During the next four years we have little knowledge of him, but it is probable that he lived in obscure indigence in Baltimore.

There is a story at first hand, which is not otherwise confirmed, that he fell deeply in love with one Mary Devereaux.[1] If this is so, it must have been in 1831 or 1832. She also is said to have jilted him, and he is supposed to have loved her

[1] See Van Cleef. *Poe's Mary. Harper's Magazine,* March, 1889.

always. The story is told that she was present in 1847 at the deathbed of Poe's wife, and that the latter said to her: "Be a friend to Eddie, and don't forsake him; he always loved you—didn't you, Eddie?" One is inclined to be skeptical, but the legend would help to explain many of the preoccupations in the short stories.

Albert Mordell has built up an interesting case on this story which merits careful, though discriminating reading.[1] Poe's first tales which are interesting to study in this light, found magazine publication in 1882.

In 1835, he was appointed assistant editor, and soon after editor-in-chief, of the *Southern Literary Messenger,* which was published at Richmond. Many of his own poems and stories appeared in its pages, and the periodical soon won reputation for itself under his editorship. He appears to have been living with his aunt Mrs. Clemm since the summer of 1833, and in May, 1836, he married her daughter Virginia, a girl of thirteen, out of generosity and family affection, I cannot help feeling, rather than unreserved freedom of choice. His love for her mother, who

[1] *The Erotic Motive in Literature,* 1919, pp. 220-236.

seems to have only too actively encouraged the match, was deep and genuine, and until Virginia's death he was a loyally kind husband, and deeply watchful in his thoughtfulness toward the invalid girl. It is useless to imply with some of Poe's biographers and critics, who go to the opposite extreme in their kindliness from the malignantly or stupidly self-righteous liar Griswold, that he had no regrets. His subconscious love rested in the past, whether with Sarah Royster or Mary Devereaux or another, and his stories embody the conflict which his conscious loyalty to Virginia Clemm did everything to banish from his heart. He kept his bargain with Virginia and her mother magnificently, but at the expense of tremendous inhibitions which found release only in his dreams and in his art.

At the end of 1836, he was obliged to resign his editorship. He had been absent from duty more than once, and had lapsed into intemperance. During the two years which followed, he appears to have been engaged in more or less unsuccessful free-lancing in Richmond, New York, and Philadelphia. From 1838 to 1844, he was settled in Philadelphia writing tales and poetry, and editing various periodicals for short periods. In 1839,

the first collection of his stories appeared in two volumes.

These years are a chronicle of desperate struggle with poverty, ill-health, alcohol, and a sick young wife. The struggle with alcohol has been cruelly exaggerated, and was by no means chronic. Mrs. Shew, who nursed him at the last and who had considerable medical knowledge, has written: "In his best health he had lesion of one side of the brain. . . . He could not bear stimulants or tonics, without producing insanity." [1] When the slightest stimulant had this effect, and when we know from the testimony of friends that Poe had very long periods of total abstinence, it is idle to pretend that he was a confirmed inebriate. Moreover, the isolated instances of great apparent ingratitude to friends upon his part may be referred to moments of abnormality when a very little alcohol could have tragic effects. As to the overemphasized personal morbidity of his stories, we must make ample deductions for the known influence of Tieck and Hoffman and the English "Gothic" romanticists upon his work, and must also recognize that weird trappings were to the taste of the age and much in its literary fore-

[1] Ingram, J. H. *Edgar Allan Poe*, 1880, ii. 115.

ground. The same charge of morbidity, we may recall, has been brought against Hawthorne and Fitz-James O'Brien.

The last five years of Poe's life were passed in New York and what was then the suburban village of Fordham. The publication of *The Raven* in 1845 made him nationally famous, but not economically self-supporting for any length of time. It is true that he became editor, and later even owner, of *The Broadway Journal*, but it was a financial failure and was suspended after a short interval. His wife died in 1847 after a lingering illness during which Poe nursed her tenderly. After her death, his inhibitions found some outward release.

We have records of several intimate and not unhappy friendships with women, to which not the faintest breath of scandal can be related, and he even became engaged once more to his former love Sarah Royster, now the wealthy and widowed Mrs. Shelton. But life had its last tragic irony. He died the defeated victim of his enemy alcohol on October 7, 1849, and was buried in Baltimore. I like to consider his life, even at the end, as a triumphant conquest of the mind, in which the outward failures of his poor physical shell were

the symbols of a Promethean conflict and a magnificent intellectual and spiritual victory. He and Melville are the only American artists who have been great enough to shake their fists with merciless laughter at the stars. It killed Poe's sense of humor, but humor is a social gift, and great conquerors are lonely men.

His poetry does not concern us here, nor does his short novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Neither have I the space to discuss his stories in their chronological order and relate them to the events of his life as they unfold year after year. André Fontainas, his latest biographer, has clearly tabulated the stories and dated them,[1] and there is a fine opportunity for a critic, who is also a careful psychologist, to undertake this investigation. Until the task has been achieved, and his poems have been studied in the same light, we shall not have a thoroughly satisfactory biography of Poe.

The tragedy of his life was a crucible which determined the future form of the American short story. Henry Seidel Canby, in a moment of brilliant insight, has written that this form "was sought first by a mind full of sharp and terrible

[1] *La Vie d'Edgar A. Poe*, 1919, pp. 279-85.

impressions needing brief and vivid narratives—that was Poe." [1] He can narrow all life and experience to an hypnotic pin-point of light that fascinates and ensnares us. His condensation goes far beyond that of Hawthorne when he concentrates his attention. In contrast to Hawthorne, he is utterly objective in his amorality. His cold, detached analysis leads him to embark upon a voyage outside the spiritual Pillars of Hercules, and to push the boundaries of knowledge and experience far beyond the uttermost known frontiers of the human mind. We sail with him into a region of polar ice till the sails of his vessel hang idle in the windless ocean, and his very words, as in the old sailor's legend, seem to freeze in glittering and mocking material substance. His pioneer countrymen scorned him, as well as Melville, for idleness, but they did not suspect that he was a far more heroic and lonely pioneer than they. Even Henry James could bring himself to suggest that "an enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection." [2]

It must be confessed that his brain with its inhuman powers of intelligence was such a brain as

[1] *The Short Story in English*, 1909, p. 302.
[2] *French Poets and Novelists*, 1878, p. 76.

might conceivably enslave a civilization that worshipped machines, if its cold lucidity had not been tempered by the passionate and unconquerable agonies of the man's soul. Poe had the brain of the supermachine in a frail body with an infirm will, and this fact does much to explain the impressions of the Goncourts and of Remy de Gourmont which I have quoted.

This abnormal lucidity is often found in the insane, and certainly Poe had frequent hypnogogic illusions, but the fact does not warrant the strained interpretations which have been put upon it. He is fascinated by the abnormal in himself and in others, yet as an artist he views it entirely as a scientific spectator. Like the mathematics of a higher space, his stories are triumphs of pure intellect. He is a realist in exposing even his own abnormalities, and as cool and collected as a skilled modern alienist. The rapid sequence of thought in the mind on its way to become act specially absorbs his attention, and in his analysis of this subtle causation, he anticipates and greatly surpasses such contemporary novelists as James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson. Moreover, he relates the chain of thinking to emotion and the springs of action as they do not. It is purposive

thought upon which he rivets the reader's attention. As a pioneer in abnormal psychology, science must take account of his contribution.

Hawthorne's desire to chronicle dream life from instant to instant is realized by Poe. Van Wyck Brooks has pointed out [1] that these men, who were the two principal artists in American literature (if we do not take Melville into account, of whom the fact holds good equally), seemed inhuman specters to their contemporaries. The pressure of hostile outward reality compelled them to escape into a romantic twilight very different from the cheap Byronic escape of most of their American contemporaries. Poe, to be sure, was "Gothic" enough in his trappings, but he evoked with them a real sense of terror that recalls the writhing agonies and ghostly flames of El Greco's pictures, and all their aspiring martyrdom of pain. If life is at times a witches' sabbath, its terrors are born of spiritual agony, and not of the clanking iron chains of Mrs. Radcliffe and Mrs. Reeve. He accepted their conventions tacitly at times, but transmuted the material.

Poe has that haunting sense of the unpardonable sin with which Hawthorne is frequently, but un-

[1] *America's Coming-of-Age*, 1915, pp. 45-6.

justly, credited, and it sets him outside of human life in his art among pure intellectual forces, terrible and searing to the soul, but over which his words have obtained a master's power at the expense of his own conviction of salvation. Such unhallowed chemistry can and does create life, but it can never introduce its progeny into the daily human round of simple hopes and fears. It is satanic with the satanism of the unsatisfied machine, forever debarred the heaven of spiritual peace it so tormentingly craves. The vessel upon which his men and women have embarked is becalmed upon a dark sultry lake in Hell, where the captain broods terribly upon his noble failure.

He has plucked the apples of the tree of knowledge, but they prove to be oak-apples which crumble to dust with a sharp report when we tread upon them. If his mind is still relentless, however, it is because his own relentlessness would consume that of his everlasting self-chosen enemy. "Nul poète," says Remy de Gourmont, "depuis les Grecs, n'a eu comme Poe le sentiment de la fatalité, de la necessité tragique." [1] J. M. Robertson has translated Hennequin's description of Poe's last portrait with its "face as of an

[1] *Promenades littéraires*, 1904, i. 358.

old woman, white and haggard, hollowed, relaxed, plowed with all the lines of grief and of the shaken reason; where over the sunken eyes, dimmed and dolorous and far-gazing, there is throned the one feature unblemished still, the superb forehead, high and firm, behind which his soul is expiring." [1]

His dissociation of personality is much more extreme than that of most creative artists, and much more conscious. His *Tale of William Wilson* is the most deliberate parable of that dissociation.

The creative Poe and the critical Poe, as F. C. Prescott has recently pointed out,[2] frequently appear as two characters in one tale. Bearing this in mind, Poe's own phrase becomes significant: "a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent." His soul and mind are in continual conflict as sworn enemies, and what the one builds up, the other would destroy. In life, this terrible conflict was never sublimated and resolved into aught but a heart-rending despair. He longed to play strange and wonderful parts on the human stage, and we know that he sometimes in waking dream

[1] *New Essays towards a Critical Method*, 1897, pp. 129-30.
[2] *The Poetic Mind*, 1922, p. 103.

seemed to remember having played them, believing that the things he desired had come to pass. But his dreams did find wish-fulfillment by their transmutation and sublimation in his art.

He has no local color, no "quaintness" in his tales. That wicked fairy's gift to the American short story was bestowed later on. His very characterization hardly ventures upon more than shadowy physical embodiment. Poe's characters are abstractions of his own qualities projected against a strange background where they stand out in dusky relief. I have just spoken of the dual representation of Poe in these characters. Here the psychological principle of transference appears to apply. The essential Poe is likely to appear in the second and less accentuated of two male characters. This is because his heroes are what he is not and what he wishes to be. The secondary character, who looks on like the leader of a Greek chorus and reports the course of events, is apt to be what Poe is and desires to escape.

Ribot points out that in an art based on symbols of revery, "everything floats in a dream, men as well as things, often without mark in time or space. Something happens, one knows not where or when; it belongs to no country, it is of no period of time;

it is *the* forest, *the* traveler, *the* city, *the* knight, *the* wood; less frequently even *He, She, It.*" [1] This is eminently true of Poe's subjective stories, and he is almost the classical illustration of the fact.

A study of his subconscious symbolism would be valuable, and would shed much light on the mental processes of the creative artist. Thus the House of Usher would seem to represent his own self-consuming clay, with its two red windows and shadowy inner chambers. *The Haunted Palace* presents the same imagery. The hyperæsthesia which he shared with Hawthorne, but to a greater degree, has been noted, and in his conscious life the boundary between sleep and waking was imperceptible.

There is an illuminating paragraph of Poe in which he says: "There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of mind, more thrillingly exciting, than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that, in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being, in the end, able to remember."

[1] *Creative Imagination.* p. 203.

This experience is not uncommon, but in Poe's case it may stand as the very symbol of his desire. His whole life was an effort to recall the strange land from which he came, but he always hovered on the verge and never saw more than a distant and illusory mirage. To him his body was the prison of his mind, and in his preoccupation with the theme of burial alive is reflected his consuming will to burst the bonds of this mortal tenement.

That he had no sense of humor is at once apparent to the reader. Humor does not flower in a graveyard, and Arthur Ransome has pointed out that "his attempts to be funny are like hangman's jokes." [1] Poe's sense of the incongruous, which was genuine enough, only stimulated him to relate incongruities to one another by an intellectual effort in a higher synthesis transcending outward event. I suspect that he might have become a great wit with his mathematical intelligence in a different environment and under happier conditions.

As it was, he satisfied his intellectual hunger by evolving an elaborate and subtle plot technique, like a lonely fur-trader on the Labrador playing

[1] *A History of Story-Telling*, 1909, p. 251.

complicated games of patience against himself to shorten the long winter days and nights. The actual structure of his ratiocinative tales is a mosaic, in which we may almost see him sorting many slips of paper to build up a logical and complicated story whose unity, however, shall be fundamental. In this he owes something to Godwin and *Caleb Williams* [1] and something to the metaphysicians.

The process is specially evident in the detective stories, which have been much overpraised. They are not literature. A detective story that is literature is no doubt possible, but it has not yet been written. The most that can be said for Poe's *tours de force* in this form is that they are measurably superior to those of Gaboriau and Conan Doyle, but this is simply due to the fact that they are more credible in detail and more closely woven. The essence of their appeal is to a sterile intellectual curiosity, which is concerned exclusively with surface pattern at the expense of depth.

As to the general and particular qualities of Poe's technique in construction, an excessive

[1] See *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe's *Works*, ed. Ingram. iii. 266.

amount has been written, and commentary upon commentary has appeared. I see no occasion here to increase the number of these commentaries, and Poe has exposed his own methods with exceptional clearness and in exceptional detail. It will serve my purpose here to quote the two passages from his work which are the keys to open all difficulties, and which summarize adequately enough his important contribution to the theory and practice of short story writing.

The first is to be found in his essay on *The Philosophy of Composition:*[1] "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect.* Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, 'of the innumerable effects or impressions of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?' Having chosen a novel first, and secondly, a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and

[1] ed. Ingram. iii. 266-7.

tone—afterwards looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event or tone as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect."

The second passage occurs in his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*.[1] "A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preëstablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided."

[1] Ibid. iv. 216.

It will be seen that Poe is thus the first to emphasize the value of a unified impression, and to point out that this unity should be not only a matter of plot, but of atmosphere and, generally speaking, of the point of view. As to preserving a single point of view, Conrad has since shown that the rule need not be absolute. The essential requisite is that the total effect of the story shall be a unit. Poe's opening paragraphs usually give us the key to his mood, and prepare us for what is to follow. No other writers except Chekhov and Henry James begin a story so carefully by suggesting the theme.

It is, on the whole, a weakness of Poe that his elaborately calculated artifice is not concealed. We are frequently conscious of his mechanics, and this does not always make for ease. In his best stories, however, he has mastered Defoe's art of precision and verisimilitude in which every stroke tells and there is a fine economy of line. Each clause brings us nearer to the climax on which his emphasis depends, and the interest, instead of being dispersed in detail, is directed toward a single cumulative effect.

Poe's taste is not impeccable. He is frequently rococo and sometimes vulgar. His deficient sense

of humor sometimes leads him astray, and we encounter provincial mannerisms in his prose. Thus he accentuates a statement by italicizing words, or occasionally by a loose cumulative series of tawdry phrases. These faults are the defects of his quality, however, and do not consistently detract from the value of his art.

That value may be summed up as the result of consummate craftsmanship, great logical lucidity, and a gift of imaginative revery. The craftsman's instinct is due to the desire of a tortured man to resolve into peaceful unity by art the incessant and consuming flame of the conflict between his soul and his mind. One recalls Captain Ahab's pursuit of his enemy, Moby Dick, the Great White Whale. This epic story symbolizes the adventure not only of Poe, but of every sincere American artist during the past century. The ship of the great Odyssey was sinking, and the lashing of the stricken whale destroyed his dauntless destroyers in the swirling vortex of a seething sea. "But as the last whelmings intermixingly poured themselves over the sunken head of the Indian at the mainmast, leaving a few inches of the erect spar yet visible, together with long streaming yards of the flag, which calmly undulated, with ironical coincidings, over the de-

stroying billows they almost touched;—at that instant, a red arm and a hammer hovered backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar. A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that ethereal thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-gasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to Hell till she had dragged a living part of Heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it. Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago."[1]

Such was the unconquerable end of Poe. How long must the battle of the American artist continue against such odds?

[1] *Moby Dick*, Chapter CXXXV.

CHAPTER V

THE MIDDLE YEARS

THE ten years which followed the death of Poe revealed no new writers of the short story who call for notice here. In 1858, however, Fitz-James O'Brien (1828-1862) attracted wide attention by his publication of a remarkable story called *The Diamond Lens.* It was hailed at once as the work of Poe's legitimate literary successor, and was followed by a series of brilliant imaginative tales. Many of these must be recovered from old files of *Harper's Magazine*, *Harper's Weekly*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Putnam's Magazine.* William Winter edited in 1881 a selection from these stories, together with a memoir and some of O'Brien's verse, and the stories were reissued in 1885, but have long been out of print. Let us have by all means a new collection of his best work, to set beside the long wanted reprints of William Austin and Herman Melville, and let it include *The Diamond Lens, The Wondersmith, The Lost Room*, and *What was it?*, as well as *Milly*

Dove, The Dragon Fang, and as many other stories as possible.

O'Brien was born somewhere in County Limerick, Ireland, probably in 1828. We know that he had been wealthy, and that he was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He was a spendthrift who wasted his fortune gaily, and came to America in 1852 to seek another, bringing with him to New York something of the air of Moore and Lever. He led a Bohemian existence in New York until the outbreak of the Civil War, writing verse and plays and criticism as well as short stories with his prolific pen, and appears to have had more than a slight resemblance to the rollicking stage Irishman of English tradition. When Fort Sumter was fired upon, he was among the first to volunteer as a soldier on the Union side, and he fell fighting in a skirmish at Cumberland, Virginia, in 1862.

Had he not been lost to American literature in his thirty-second year, he might have surpassed Bret Harte, though he would hardly have equalled either Hawthorne or Poe, whose tradition he so successfully carried on. His present obscurity, like that of Ambrose Bierce whom he superficially resembles is unaccountable. His literary work, apart from his stories, is negligible, and some of

his unreprinted stories are meretricious melodrama.

We are conscious of a deliberate quest of the sensational in all his stories, and as a matter of fact he brought the short story as Poe conceived it nearer to its modern public by adopting what are frankly sensational themes and redeeming them by his imaginative handling. Moreover, it is his distinction, when he is at his best, that he confers upon Poe's dream background a local habitation and a name. He even foreshadows Maupassant in his deliberate realism, and Brander Matthews has noted the remarkable parallelism between *What Was It?* and *Le Horla.*

The best of his stories are much more modern than those of Bunner or Howells, and seem likely to outlast the work of many of his esteemed successors. If he imitated Poe, he did so avowedly and was justified by his thorough mastery of Poe's technique. Too much has been made of this debt and, as a matter of fact, he owes nearly as much to Dickens, while there is more than a trace of Hawthorne's use of atmosphere in several of his stories. The unity of impression and the cumulative effect of carefully selected detail which we perceive proceed directly from Poe's precepts al-

ready quoted, but the freshness of view is his own. He brings Poe's strangeness and impressionism home to everyday life, and makes extravagance credible by his circumstantial and logical presentation of it. Add to all this a lively and delicate phantasy playing upon unusual conceptions with charm and no little humor, and we have an equipment sufficient for its possessor to achieve an important place in American literature. Had war spared him, and maturity made his poetic nature more reflective, it is difficult to surmise how far he might have gone.

Of Bayard Taylor (1825-1878) and George William Curtis (1824-1892), there is considerably less to be said. Bayard Taylor was a representative American of his time, an excellent journalist, a poet of modest but sometimes genuine pretensions, an accomplished traveler whose records of travel still have interest, an admirable translator, and a novelist and short story-writer of somewhat amateur distinction. But his tale entitled *Who Was She?* [1] (1874) and one or two other stories have considerable interest and are well sustained.

[1] Reprinted in Baldwin's *American Short Stories*, 1904, pp. 269-287.

As to Curtis, the documents are to be found chiefly in *Prue and I* (1856). These papers, half essay and half story, are in the tradition of Irving, but are more saccharine. They still appear to give pleasure, and it must be admitted that they have a somewhat self-conscious charm. The most characteristic is perhaps *Titbottom's Spectacles.* Other stories of some historical interest may be found in the files of *The Knickerbocker Magazine,* especially between 1855 and 1858. With Curtis, Irving's short story tradition practically dies out, and there seems to be little likelihood of its revival as modern taste has evolved.

Edward Everett Hale (1822-1909) may be credited with the creation of one of the few American legends. After Fitz-James O'Brien's story, *The Diamond Lens,* which appeared in 1858, the next tale to win a national reputation was *The Man Without a Country* (1863). It is true that it had the advantage of appearing in the North during the most anxious period of the Civil War, and of appealing to the crowd psychology of a nation at its most feverish moment, but the story would have won a reputation for its author at any time, and if it seems to lack the finer graces of a distinguished literary style, its quality as pure story-

telling assures it at least qualified permanence. In an introduction to the Boston edition of 1905, Hale has narrated the circumstances of the story's origin. It was designed half-consciously as propaganda, and by a curious coincidence gained credence in many quarters as the actual life-history of one Philip Nolan who had played an historical part in the early history of Texas. A critic who faces the story squarely must confess that it is not without a note of false sentiment cleverly played upon, but the undercurrent of the story is undoubtedly genuine, and the crisp nervous manner in which it is reported is admirably adapted to the subject. The tale has that emphasis of understatement which is seldom a quality of American fiction, and which is well adapted to produce the illusion of historical truth. The appeal, however, is broad rather than subtle, and this partially accounts for its universal popularity even in our own day. Hale wrote many other short stories which are forgotten, if we except *My Double, and How He Undid Me,*[1] whose somewhat obvious quality of humor still finds it an appreciative public.

[1] Reprinted in Jessup's *The Best American Humorous Short Stories,* 1920, pp. 75-93.

Edward Everett Hale was a New England clergyman, and essayed New England subjects without any special success. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, whose aim was more or less didactic, published numerous volumes of short stories with New England backgrounds, among which *Men, Women, and Ghosts* (1869) is sufficiently representative of her early manner, and *The Empty House* (1910) of her later work. Her life as a writer spans a long interval, but I do not think that her stories, which have been admired by competent critics, will last much longer than the equally popular novels of Susan Warner and Mrs. Molesworth.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) in her short stories, which are episodic, was rather more successful in preserving fidelity to New England manners. She was really the first of the New England regionalists, and led the way to the finer accomplishment of Rose Terry Cooke, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Alice Brown, and others. She had published tales as early as 1843 when *The Mayflower* appeared, but the best of her short narratives are to be found in *Oldtown Folks* (1869) and *Poganuc People* (1878). Both of these books have a crisp humor which has not quite sufficed to preserve them until our day.

With Rose Terry Cooke (1827-1892) we find ourselves on still firmer ground. She published short stories at frequent intervals from the late forties until 1891, and like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was contemporary with a long period of American development. She proved more adaptable to changes in the current taste, and yet succeeded in imparting an unmistakable individual flavor to her work. In such volumes as *Somebody's Neighbors* (1881) and *Huckleberries Gathered from New England Hills* (1891), we find her earlier clearness of vision and sympathetic gifts of homely rendering matured by a vigorous, yet leisurely, narrative style. Her range is tolerably wide, and she would seem to have taken considerable pains in the documentation of aspects of life with which she could hardly have been personally familiar. We know that she was for years a country school-teacher, and in her quiet field of experience she learned to appreciate the value of homely realism. She is among the first to use dialect naturally and with precision, and gently alternates the sober humors of New England country life with its more tragic aspects, which are never overemphasized, yet never quite forgotten. Many later writers have carried her

methods much further to the point of caricature, while Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett have shown greater subtlety and a finer feeling for construction. Rose Terry Cooke may rightly claim, however, to be the pioneer and one of the most important figures among the many chroniclers of New England country life. It is odd that tales such as *Mrs. Flint's Married Experience* [1] and *The Town and Country Mouse* [2] have not found their way into short story collections. They may not have the bouquet of more celebrated vintages, but they have the dependable flavor of good home-made elderberry wine.

The other short story-writers of the middle years are deservedly forgotten as such, with the noteworthy exceptions of Bret Harte and Mark Twain whom we shall discuss in the next chapter. Holmes and Longfellow occasionally essayed this form without noteworthy success. Longfellow's stories may be characterized as Irving and water, while Holmes achieved an isolated and not very remarkable *tour de force* in his sketch, *A Visit to the Asylum for Aged and Decayed Punsters* (1861).

[1] *Somebody's Neighbors.*
[2] *Huckleberries.*

A word may be said, however, with reference to Albert Falvey Webster (1848-1876), who won not undeserved esteem in his day, but who is now entirely forgotten. He contributed many stories to *Appleton's Journal* after 1870, which show much promise and a keen interest in experimentation. His stories are romantic and thoughtful and owe a great deal to Hawthorne, to whose daughter he was engaged before his untimely death at the age of twenty-eight. Among his best tales are *Miss Eunice's Glove* [1] and *An Operation in Money.* [2] His frequent overemphasis is a young man's fault, and his looseness of construction may have been due to an invalid's listlessness. There is enough promise in his work to make us regret that it was not possible for him to reach maturity.

[1] Scribner's *Stories by American Authors.* vi. 117.
[2] Ibid. i. 146.

CHAPTER VI

BRET HARTE AND MARK TWAIN

Fitz-James O'Brien and Edward Everett Hale have won minor, but somewhat permanent, places in the history of the American short story. Their contemporary Bret Harte has gained a much wider suffrage from which it appears difficult to displace him. His best stories are of very high rank indeed, but nearly all of them were produced in a period of two or three years, and the voluminous literary output which followed during the thirty years of life that remained to him is of little more than ephemeral interest for the most part.

Francis Bret Harte was born on August 25, 1839, in Albany, New York. His father was a teacher of Greek in a small college, and died when the boy was fifteen. Harte had little formal schooling, for he was a puny boy, but he plunged into much desultory reading of fiction, and acquired a special fondness for Dickens and Irving which is evident enough in his writings. In 1854, he and his mother embarked for California by way

of Panama. We know that they lived for a time in Oakland across the bay from San Francisco, but the date of his mother's death, and even her personal relations with her son, are obscure. Harte apparently found various odd jobs in San Francisco and drifted from one to another. We may surmise the deep effect of the stir and color in this pioneer life upon an impressionable boy who was fresh from an academic home in provincial Knickerbocker Albany. Seldom do time and place and temperament come together so fortunately.

Later, he taught school in Sonora with indifferent success, although the reader will note that Sonora is in Calaveras County, and that Calaveras County is the chosen scene for some of his best stories. In later years, he had something to say of the pioneer life here as it impressed him in his formative years. "Here I was thrown among the strangest social conditions that the latter-day world has perhaps seen. The setting was itself heroic. The great mountains of the Sierra Nevada lifted majestic, snow-capped peaks against a sky of purest blue. Magnificent pine forests of trees which were themselves enormous gave to the landscape a sense of largeness and greatness. It was a land of rugged cañons, sharp declivities, and

magnificent distances. Amid rushing waters and wildwood freedom, an army of strong men, in red shirts and top-boots, were feverishly in search of the buried gold of earth. . . . Weaklings and old men were unknown. . . . It was a civilization composed entirely of young men, for on one occasion, I remember, an elderly man—he was fifty, perhaps, but he had a grey beard—was pointed out as a curiosity in the city, and men turned in the street to look at him as they would have looked at any other unfamiliar object.

". . . Woman was almost unknown, and enjoyed the high estimation of a rarity. The chivalry natural to manhood invested her with ideal value when respect could supplement it, and with exceptional value even when it could not. Strong passions brought quick climaxes, all the better and worse forces of manhood being in unbridled play. To me it was like a strange, ever-varying panorama, so novel that it was difficult to grasp comprehensively."

The young man's experience of this life in all its aspects could not possibly have been more varied. He tried mining, was an express messenger, a collector of taxes, and a druggist's clerk, became secretary to the superintendent of

the San Francisco Mint, and, most fortunately of all, a newspaper compositor. In this last capacity on a paper called *The Golden Era* he embarked upon his literary career in San Francisco. Mark Twain, Charles Warren Stoddard, and other brilliant young men were also journalists in the town, and they, as well as Bret Harte, were connected with the short-lived newspaper known as *The Californian*, to which I shall have occasion to refer presently in speaking of Mark Twain.

In 1868, Harte was appointed editor-in-chief of *The Overland Monthly*, which had just been established, and it was in the second number of this periodical that he printed *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, and like Byron and Kipling woke to find himself famous. The inhibitions of frontier life are clear in Harte's account of the story's reception in the publishing offices before it appeared. "He had not yet received the proof-sheets when he was suddenly summoned to the office of the publisher, whom he found standing, the picture of dismay and anxiety, with the proof before him. The indignation and stupefaction of the author can be well understood when he was told that the printer, instead of returning the proofs to him, had submitted them to the publisher, with the emphatic

declaration that the matter there was so indecent, irreligious, and improper that his proofreader—a young lady—had with difficulty been induced to continue its perusal." [1]

The Luck of Roaring Camp took the country by storm, despite the prudery of local Tartuffes. *The Atlantic Monthly* invited him to become a regular contributor, and he refused a professorship of literature in the new University of California. Story now followed story in quick and brilliant succession, and the first and best of his collections was issued in book form in 1869. He began to feel that he had outgrown California, and in 1870 bade it farewell forever. On his triumphal trip east he was fêted as a national hero in a manner only comparable to the later European journeys of Mark Twain. But his best work was already accomplished, and although the *Atlantic Monthly* subsidized him for a time at the rate of ten thousand dollars a year, it proved a bad bargain from an editorial point of view, for Harte's head was completely turned with praise. What would Poe have thought, and what passed through the lonely mind of Herman Melville at this mo-

[1] Boynton, *Bret Harte*, 1905, pp. 26-27.

ment? It is hard to tell, but the irony of life persists in laughing at fine artists.

Harte's writing, from being an art, soon descended to the level of a profession, and presently the transition was swift from a profession to a trade, although a gleam of the old fire lingered always, and is found in *Colonel Starbottle for the Plaintiff* [1] as late as 1901, the year before his death. During the remainder of his life, he was a social butterfly, airy about his debts, and apparently still more airy about his wife and four children whom he left behind in 1878, when he accepted the American consulate at Crefield in Germany, and for whom he never sent. Did he consider that his family lacked his own social graces, we wonder, or did he find his wife an awkward realist? We do not know. Their outward relations seem to have remained harmonious, but Harte always took the easiest way, and for him the easiest way was that of a bachelor in English country houses.

Germany bored him, and he was transferred by political wire-pulling to the consulate at Glasgow, where he proved to be something of an absentee,

[1] *Harper's Monthly*, March, 1901.

and was encouraged to resign in 1885. He passed the rest of his life in England, having on the whole outlived his best talents, and died there on May 5, 1902. He had missed in England everything which Henry James had found.

In his preface to *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, Harte has summarized his artistic aims with tolerable clearness. "I trust that in the following sketches I have abstained from any positive moral. I might have painted my villains of the blackest dye,—so black, indeed, that the originals thereof would have contemplated them with the glow of comparative virtue. I might have made it impossible for them to have performed a virtuous or generous action, and have thus avoided that moral confusion which is apt to arise in the contemplation of mixed motives and qualities. But I should have burdened myself with the responsibility of their creation, which, as a humble writer of romance and entitled to no particular reverence, I did not care to do.

"I fear I cannot claim, therefore, any higher motive than to illustrate an era of which Californian history has preserved the incidents more often than the character of the actors,—an era which the panegyrist was too often content to

bridge over with a general compliment to its survivors,—an era still so recent that in attempting to revive its poetry, I am conscious also of awakening the more prosaic recollections of these same survivors,—and yet an era replete with a certain heroic Greek poetry, of which perhaps none were more unconscious than the heroes themselves. And I shall be quite content to have collected here merely the materials for the Iliad that is yet to be sung."

Such were his aims, and it must be confessed that in his first volume, at least, he went far towards achieving them. These stories portray an interesting society which has long vanished, although the current Western story of commerce would not tend to make us conscious of the fact. They came at the psychological moment to ensure their success. The Civil War was over, and America was at the beginning of the transition period, when the sense of nationality and continental destiny was newly awakened, and there was a strong desire to realize and appreciate the life of the new frontiers. Harte, at the age of twenty-nine, stumbled upon a form of writing which satisfied this national craving without demanding from the reader any special reflection or

subtlety of appreciation. The public response was like a literary Louisiana Purchase. The nation was flattered, and it repaid the compliment by flattering Bret Harte.

Unfortunately he had neither the strength of character nor the artistic integrity to resist the spell for any length of time. A drifting temperament with little moral courage and only too prone to follow the rule of *laissez faire*, he seems to have had much easy charm, a winning garrulity of speech, and a code of worldly wisdom. He was hardly noted for his sense of responsibility, and he could have had few deep friendships, but he must have had a host of acquaintances. Boynton has noted his capacity for sentimental self-pity, but he never allowed self-pity to embitter his pleasures. Pettie's portrait shows a week mouth, emphasized rather than concealed by a flowing moustache, and eyes which reveal no fixed purpose or surety of conviction.

Pemberton, his first biographer, exclaims: "What attention should be paid to a critic who prefers the subtleties of Henry James to the wholesome pathos of Bret Harte!" Unfortunately, the "wholsome pathos" of Bret Harte is often strik-

ingly similar to the "wholesome pathos" of Paul Dombey and Little Nell.

At any rate he gave the American public what it wanted, and America gave him in return what he wanted,—adulation, money, and ease. He was the wicked fairy at the christening of the short story who bestowed on it the fatal gifts of type and of local color, and he rather more than paved the way for the advent of the surprise ending. Essentially an imitative talent without marked originality, and with a sense of the theater rather than a sense of drama, he was fortunate enough to find a life of seldom paralleled vividness to photograph. To-day he would be the most popular of moving-picture actors, and he would be well-satisfied. His imitativeness frequently borders with perilous closeness upon parody and, as we know, much of his prose and verse is avowed parody.

He has neither subtlety nor spiritual power, and he seldom avoids false sentiment for long. We may, moreover, regard him as the first American story-writer in an ever-lengthening series whose art has been profoundly corrupted by great financial rewards too easily won. He seldom resolved the

conflict between his instinct to be truthful and his equally strong instinct to obscure the truth in a sentimental haze. His psychology is solid and reasonably satisfying when he is at his best, but it is never deeply apprehended, and at his worst we have the heresy of "types" presenting before us the stagy and creaking conventions of cheap Western melodrama. There are two kinds of simplification in literature: the subtle choice of the precise strokes which will tell, and the lazy blurring manner of the professional raconteur. We find both in Harte, and frequently together.

He established in America the sentimental convention of the strong, silent man, and that is largely the secret of his English vogue. Kipling, who learned from him everything that Harte had to teach, accepted the formula and carried it to a higher human level, but in Harte's work all later short stories of active event are already implicit. When he leaves the life of pioneer California, his work is negligible. His stories of European life are rubbish, and his tales of the Spanish missions, which are bad Irving, will cure insomnia.

What then is the merit of Bret Harte? Well, he is the typical "man of feeling," and at his best he combines sense and sensibility in his work. We

also find swift and vivid narrative, unity rising to effective climax, and a worthy subject matter for a romantic epic. Pioneer life is rendered vividly for the first time. In an article entitled *The Rise of the Short Story*,[1] he pleaded that his wish was to accept life as he found it, and to record it faithfully without provinciality and without passing a moral judgment. He implied that he believed himself to have been eminently successful in achieving this absence of provinciality, and seems to have considered that in this respect his work showed a marked improvement over the work of Hawthorne and Poe. There is a false glitter about his general plea, and not a little fatuousness, but I believe that his first intentions were thoroughly honest, and that for a short time they were successfully realized.

He built upon Poe's structure, but sought the unexpected rather than the marvelous. The feeling of this contrast has led critics to call him a realist, which is true if we allow for considerable qualification. He was conscious of the art with which Poe and Hawthorne utilized tone color for their effects, but he could seldom subdue his color to its appropriate place in the background. There

[1] *Cornhill Magazine*, July, 1899.

is usually a glare, and I dare say this accounts for some of his popularity. One also feels that he was a little too anxious to present America with a literature which it would readily acknowledge, to question the value either of his methods or of his achievements.

As we have noted, he was fond of Dickens, and from Dickens he learned the effectiveness of caricature in the portrayal of human nature. Harte did not realize, however, that the secret of Dickens is his manner of selecting one tiny but characteristic detail and heightening it discreetly, while in his own method he heightens the whole picture till everything stands out in relief and there is no shadow. To ask of him the Shakespearean sense of comedy which Dickens possessed would be unfair. True comedy is born of suffering and rich human sympathy. It is not bestowed upon those who follow consistently the line of least resistance.

The parallel between the naked light of California and the lack of penumbra in Harte's short stories has not been pointed out, so far as I know. The two facts would appear to be related as cause and effect. His later stories, written under English skies, while he recalled the California of his youth, have sharper and sharper outlines. In

his earlier stories, the fault is less noticeable, and occasionally, as in *Tennessee's Partner*, his sense of nature becomes almost pantheistic, so that the forest plays the part of a sympathetic Greek chorus to the action of the tale.

What conflict was Harte called upon as an artist to resolve? It was the essential conflict of pioneer society in new settlements which no writer who has experienced it has ever successfully sublimated, though it is a possible achievement. "It was, in one sense, a free life," says Van Wyck Brooks, half-paraphrasing Bret Harte.[1] "It was an irresponsible life, it implied a break with civilization, with domestic, religious and political ties. Nothing could be freer in that sense than the society of the gold-seekers in Nevada and California as we find it pictured in *Roughing It*. Free as that society was, nevertheless, scarcely any normal instinct could have been expressed or satisfied in it. The pioneers were not primitive men, they were civilized men, often of gentle birth and education, men for whom civilization had implied many restraints, of course, but innumerable avenues also of social and personal expression and activity to which their natures were accustomed.

[1] *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, 1920, p. 201.

In escaping responsibility, therefore, they had only placed themselves in a position where their instincts were blocked on every side. There were so few women among them, for instance, that their sexual lives were either starved or debased; and children were as rare as the 'Luck' of Roaring Camp, a story that shows how hysterical, in consequence of these and similar conditions, the mining population was. Those who were accustomed to the exercise of complex tastes and preferences found themselves obliged to conform to a single monotonous routine."

Now there was a magnificent opportunity here for a literary artist to sum up in a great gesture the whole pioneer conflict between suppressed instinct and environment, and to resolve and sublimate the struggle. Bret Harte admirably portrayed the picturesque side of this life, and showed no little sentimental sympathy with it in doing so, but he missed its epic tide, and to this day the pioneer west awaits its great chronicler. Such a man must possess all the narrative qualities of Bret Harte, all the human depth of Mark Twain, and a capacity for testing and transcending experience which both men lacked. Melville could have done it, but his life found expression in other

channels. It has not been done in Australia, where the same opportunity offered. Now it is perhaps too late, for the chance would seem to have passed. Jack London had the experience, but he succumbed to the public, as most of Bret Harte's successors have succumbed.

In fact, Harte was a perfect type of the literature which was to follow him. Sharp-sighted, eager, nervous, superficial, anxious for quick results, and with a sentimental faith in his star, he may be taken to represent a common American ideal of the happy warrior. His heroism finds wish-fulfillment only in his writings, and it finds fulfillment there only in a fundamental romantic evasion of reality. The short story is in the market-place as soon as he publishes his first tale, and it is only a step to "O. Henry" and his school of protective coloration. Harte is far from being the greatest of American story writers, but he is probably the most representative of the characteristic qualities and weaknesses, and historically he may prove to have been our most influential man.

Bret Harte may claim fairly enough to have given Mark Twain (1835-1910), who was known in private life as Samuel Langhorne Clemens, his opportunity, for he published in *The Californian,*

The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County. As Mark Twain's contributions to the history of the American short story are only casual, though thoroughly characteristic, I shall not discuss his life nor his position in letters at length. Moreover, Van Wyck Brooks, who ranks with T. S. Eliot as the most intellectually mature of contemporary American critics, has illustrated the general thesis of this book with superb skill so far as Clemens is concerned in his masterly volume, *The Ordeal of Mark Twain.*[1]

Much of what I have said about Bret Harte applies with even greater force to the author of *A Double-Barrelled Detective Story* and *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg.* In fact, the latter story is a perfect example of escape from reality by vicarious wish-fulfillment. Such mordant cynicism is a reaction from inhibitions, and the conflict between the instinct of a great artist for sincerity and the unresisted temptation to conformity as a typical rather than a unique American. In most of his better short stories, Mark Twain is really licking his sores, and his grim laughter, masked as exaggeration of obvious in-

[1] New York, 1920. As *The Tragedy of Mark Twain,* London, 1922.

congruities, has the death-rattle of the soul in it.

These stories are improvisations rather than logically constructed tales, and often Mark Twain is at no pains to conceal his jerry-building. Thus *A Double-Barrelled Detective Story* starts out grimly enough as lurid melodrama, and ends as farce, and there is a grimace rather than a smile in *The £1,000,000 Bank-Note.*

The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg, which is his chief show-piece, is a *tour de force,* and it is by this tale alone that his reputation as a short story writer must stand or fall. Its vitality cannot be denied, and it displays considerable constructive power. If the style is undistinguished, the conception, which is not, is adequately realized, and the effect of the tale upon the reader is like an electrical discharge of energy that is equally likely to blast or to stimulate. We respect and admire it, but we prefer to contemplate its power at a distance, and although we realize what a relief it must have been to the suppressed wishes of Mark Twain, we feel that he has taken the easiest way of seeking this relief.

Van Wyck Brooks illustrates the point: "According to Freud . . . the pleasurable effect of humor consists in affording 'an economy of ex-

pendituré in feeling.' It requires an infinitely smaller psychic effect to expel one's spleen in a verbal joke than in a practical joke or a murder, the common method among the pioneers, and it is infinitely safer, too!—a fact that instantly explains the function of the humorist in pioneer society and the immense success of Mark Twain." [1] In other words, Clemens escaped from pioneer life by false humor as Bret Harte escaped by an excessive sentiment, and the method of both was to employ exaggeration.

I should be sorry to leave the impression that my discussion of these two men constitutes an indictment of them. It does not. On the contrary, I have sought to show that an artist surrounded by a pioneer civilization of which he is a part has all the odds conceivable against his success. His training, his desires, his fears, his relations to the world about him, even his family and his faith, will betray him unless he has an iron will, independence of spirit, and exceptional freshness of vision. He may fall far short of his hopes even then, like Poe and Melville, but on the other hand he may blaze a trail to the promised land of art for his literary descendants to follow.

[1] *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, 1920, p. 205.

CHAPTER VII

HENRY JAMES

BRET HARTE felt that it was life that makes art, and by life he meant years of crowded incident and physical adventure. Henry James thought differently and wrote: "It is art that *makes* life." [1] Whether we agree with him or not, the challenge of his statement, which is developed in all his writings, marks a new point of departure in American fiction.

The outward events of his life are of little importance, while his inward development is largely concealed from us by his own reticence, despite the letters and numerous prefaces which he has left behind. He was born in New York on April 15, 1843. His father, who was of Irish descent, was a notable philosopher of Swedenborgian leanings. His mother was of Scottish origin, and the atmosphere of the James home was one of unconventional simplicity. Plain living and high thinking, a wide rather than a deep culture, many social

[1] *Letters*, 1920, ii. 490.

contacts with American and foreign writers and thinkers, and a tendency to wander were the chief characteristics of this environment. His parents took him to Europe when he was a year old, and his precocious responsiveness to impressions is evidenced by his belief in later life that he could recall from this trip his first sight of the Place Vendôme in Paris. His early boyhood was divided between Albany and New York City for the most part. We know that he was privately educated in a more or less erratic manner, and that from 1855 to 1858, during most impressionable years, he was wandering with his parents, now in Geneva or London, now in Paris or Boulogne. A year followed in Newport, Rhode Island, and then another year of desultory study at Geneva and Bonn.

In 1860, he is back in Newport dreaming and, according to Thomas Sargent Perry, writing extravagantly romantic boyish stories. We picture an otherwise closely-knit family, in which Henry stands a little apart and lonely, perhaps at a disadvantage beside the wit of his two brothers. He entered Harvard in 1862, and henceforth Boston or Cambridge was his American home. He formed an intimacy at this time with Howells,

who printed much of his earliest work in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Writing long afterwards to Henry Adams,[1] he said: "I wanted to invest dull old Boston with a mellow, a golden glow—and that for those who know, like yourself, I only make it bleak—and weak! Luckily those who know are indeed but three or four—and they won't, I hope, too promiscuously tell." We may read between the lines of this that James was not too happy in Boston, and indeed we know from other sources how he longed for a European life. It is true that he succeeded in spending the year 1869 in England, Switzerland, Italy and France, and that from 1872 until the autumn of 1874 he had another period of European residence, but as yet he was not settled, and the conflict was so deep and so prolonged that it determined for the rest of his life the subject-matter of his art.

Speaking of his return to America in 1870, he has confessed: "The nostalgic poison had been distilled for him, the future presented to him but as a single intense question: was he to spend it in brooding exile, or might he somehow come into his 'own'?" [2]

[1] Nov. 19, 1903. *Letters*, 1920, i. 439.

[2] Preface to *The Reverberator*, London, 1922, pp. xxi-xxii.

The autumn of 1875 marked the period of his final decision to make his home in Europe. He settled in Paris at first, and was admitted to terms of intimacy with Turgenev, Flaubert, Maupassant, Daudet, Zola, Edmond de Goncourt, and others. The very great influence of Turgenev upon his work is hardly second to that of Balzac and Hawthorne, and Flaubert and Maupassant gave him something more than a passion for technique. If we add an early but rather strong influence from the novels of George Eliot, we shall have practically completed the list of his literary derivations, which are less significant in his case than in that of any other American writer of fiction.

Paris gave place to London the following year, and it was in England that he found his spiritual home, although he did not become a British citizen until a few months before his death. England ministered to his sense of the past, while preserving his consciousness of continuity in race and language. As a novelist, he was to write in English, and not in French. America was young and, as he said not altogether truly in 1880, "it takes an old civilization to set a novelist in motion." [1]

[1] *Letters*, 1920, i. 72. To W. D. Howells.

Save for two years (1881-3) which were chiefly spent in America because of the death of his parents, and a final visit for a few months twenty years later, he was never to leave Europe again. The chronicle of this last forty years is simply a record of books and friendships till death claimed him in Chelsea on February 28, 1916. We may note, however, the fact, which has been scarcely emphasized, that in later years he more than once expressed a wish that young American writers might remain at home; and we may add to this fact two little recorded moments in the life of Henry James when he was off guard. These two pictures tell us more about him than all his letters and all his prefaces.

Let Desmond MacCarthy offer us the first picture. "It was after a luncheon party of which he had been, as they say, 'the life.' We happened to be drinking our coffee together while the rest of the party had moved on to the verandah. 'What a charming picture they make,' he said, with his great head aslant, 'the women there with their embroidery, the . . .' There was nothing in his words—anybody might have spoken them—but in his attitude, in his voice, in his whole being, there was a suggestion of such complete detachment,

that I was startled into speaking out of myself: 'I can't bear to look at life like that, I want too much to be in it—it makes me feel absolutely alone—perhaps that is why I cannot *write*. . . .' The effect of this confession upon him was surprising. He leant forward and grasped my arm excitedly: "Yes, it is absolute solitude. Absolute solitude. If it runs after you and catches you, well and good. But for heaven's sake don't run after *it!*' And he got up hurriedly and joined the others." [1]

Edmund Gosse supplies the other incident. "I was staying alone with Henry James at Rye one summer, and as twilight deepened we walked together in the garden. . . . I suddenly found that in profuse and enigmatic language he was recounting to me an experience, something that had happened, not something repeated or imagined. He spoke of standing on the pavement of a city, in the dusk, and of gazing upwards across the misty street, watching, watching for the lighting of a lamp in a window on the third story. And the lamp blazed out, and through bursting tears he strained to see what was behind it, the unapproachable face. And for hours he stood there, wet with the rain, brushed

[1] New Statesman, May 15, 1920, p. 164.

by the phantom hurrying figures of the scene, and never from behind the lamp was for one moment visible the face. . . . And for a long time Henry James shuffled beside me in the darkness, shaking the dew off the laurels, and still there was no sound at all in the garden but what our heels made crunching the gravel, nor was the silence broken when suddenly we entered the house and he disappeared for an hour." [1] When we add to these two pictures a sentence from a letter to Mr. Arthur Christopher Bensen written in 1896, we have learned all that we need to know. "Let your soul live," James says, "—it's the only life that isn't, on the whole, a sell." [2]

We may add, however, a few notes on his literary method drawn from those invaluable prefaces to the New York edition of his novels and tales which form the most complete exposition of the art of fiction ever given to the world by a great story-teller, and we may add to these a phrase or two from his published letters.

In his preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*,[3] he makes an important distinction. "A short story,"

[1] *Aspects and Impressions*, 1922, pp. 42-43.
[2] *Letters*, 1920, i. 259.
[3] London edition, 1922, p. xxvii.

he writes, "to my sense and as the term is used in magazines, has to choose between being either an anecdote or a picture and can but play its part strictly according to its kind. I rejoice in the anecdote, but I revel in the picture."

Elsewhere he speaks of "the author's incorrigible taste for gradations and superpositions of effect, his love, when it is a question of a picture, of anything that makes for proportion and perspective, that contributes to a view of *all* the dimensions addicted to seeing 'through'—one thing through another, accordingly, and still other things through *that*—he takes, too greedily perhaps, on any errand, as many things as possible by the way. It is after this fashion that he incurs the stigma of laboring uncannily for a certain fullness of truth—truth diffused, distributed and, as it were, atmospheric." [1] Again, he refers to "that odd law which somehow always makes the minimum of valid suggestion serve the man of imagination better than the maximum," [2] and remarks presently that "we are divided . . . between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar; the difficulty is, for intensity, to catch it at the moment

[1] Preface to *What Maisie Knew*, London edition, 1922, p. xx.
[2] *The Aspern Papers*, London, 1922, p. viii.

when the scales of the balance hang with the right evenness." [1]

He recurs more than once to his emphasis on the uselessness, and even danger, to the artist of too much immediate broad material, and refers to "the modern reporter's big brushes, attached to broomhandles that match the height of his sky-scrapers," [2] and has the following illuminating comment on his passion for what is difficult in its complexity and subtlety. "One has to choose ever so delicately among one's difficulties, attaching one's self to the greatest, bearing hard on those and intelligently neglecting the others. If one attempts to tackle them all, one is certain to deal completely with none; whereas the effectual dealing with a few casts a blest golden haze under cover of which, like wanton mocking goddesses in clouds, the others find prudent to retire." [3] Now there is an half-humorous confession of evasion here which is fundamental and hitherto insufficiently noticed. It is justified in art by its fruits only, and always justified by Henry James. In life, it may constitute self-deception, and James never practiced it carelessly in life, but more than one

[1] Ibid, p. xi.
[2] *What Maisie Knew*, 1922, p. xx.
[3] *The Aspern Papers*, London edition, 1922, p. xxi.

American artist influenced by him in this respect practices such evasion with half-unconscious dishonesty, and what is a virtue in the great man becomes an insidious weakness in some of his disciples.

Two revealing passages from his letters close my little anthology. He writes to his brother William in 1888: "I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America, . . . and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized." [1] Finally, writing to Mrs. Cadwalader Jones in 1902, he defends his habit in later life of dictating his stories by pointing out that it helps him "to do over and over," and claims that the act of dictating becomes "*intellectually*, absolutely identical with the act of writing." [2]

In these passages, Henry James has given us very clearly the chief clues, not only as to his method, but also as to his conception of the relation

[1] *Letters*, 1920, i. 143.
[2] Ibid, i. 411.

which he wished to establish between art and life. We may note a few further points in passing.

The essence of his achievement is the consummate manner in which he formulates little by little and then resolves by sublimating the eternal conflict in man between the easiest way and what he terms "the finer grain." In this conflict he entirely vanishes himself. He is not even to be found as the disinterested spectator. He appreciates, of course, the value of the disinterested spectator, but he prefers to create her (she is usually a lady of discriminations) as a new character for each fresh occasion. There is a precedent for this in the confidante whom we usually encounter in French classical drama, and who stands as a conventional substitute for the Greek chorus, but no other writer of fiction has seen the value of substituting the confidante for the omniscient story-teller. It brings the story nearer, and preserves the illusion of intimacy. He even carries this principle of substitution a long step further to the advantage of his art. Instead of analyzing his characters, as is usual in the omniscient convention, his characters analyze themselves and one another, and the secret of his suspense is his ability

to make the reader anxiously await the moment of their psychological discoveries of one another. In fact, his characters actually "live by their wits" in the finest of senses.

His extreme detachment from the scene of his imaginings has frequently been noted, and too much stress has been laid upon it. In fact, it has led to a very serious misconception of his achievement. His detachment is never cold: it is kingly. It is very different, for example, from that of Stendhal who is his peer, because he invariably projects his characters into an atmosphere of vibrant curiosity and sympathy toward one another. If he stands aside completely, it is only that they may come more closely together, and their extreme lucidity of insight is due to their extraordinary sensitivity of human feeling, which is the measure of his own.

This sensitivity of Henry James is really due to a sort of double consciousness. Desmond MacCarthy has noted that James in conversation was continually reflecting a dual personality, and it may be represented by such formulas as "I rather think" and "Henry James would seem to think" respectively. "The sensation of his hand on my

shoulder in our pausing rambles together was, I felt, precisely an exhortation to patience. 'Wait,' that reassuring pressure seemed to be humorously saying, 'Wait; I know, my dear fellow, you are getting fidgety, but wait, and we shall enjoy together the wild pleasure of discovering what "Henry James" really thinks of this matter—for my part, I dare not hurry him.' " [1] And it is because he would intensify this experience for his readers that he lets us view events through the lens of an exceptionally alert and sensitive mind, or group of minds, which he has created.

If he were the cold passionless analyst whom many critics have pictured, he would not have been so warmly tolerant. Yet his conscious judgments are boundless in their charity, if his subconscious selections are Puritan. In fact, he succeeded in making the Puritan passion for duty which he inherited a great adventure in discovery. He never condemns. There are no villains in his books, and little sin in the sense of the New England transcendentalists who are his spiritual ancestors,—Hawthorne, for example. There is plenty of moral weakness, but he almost invariably

[1] *New Statesman.* May 15, 1920, p. 162.

ascribes it to defective insight, and has a gentle pity for it. He conceives his mission as the remedying of this defective insight.

His stories are subtle studies in spiritual good taste, and I suspect that if they were translated into direct terms of poverty and chastity and obedience, which could readily be done, they would prove an excellent school for saints, assuming that saints are not altogether out of fashion.

Ford Madox Hueffer, whose illuminating study of Henry James, is otherwise beyond reproach, insists upon his absence of pity, and remarks that "he does not . . . expect to improve the world by advocating anything. . . . *He merely gives you material.*" [1] He is not a moralist by precept, to be sure, but after all he is a tremendous moralist by implication. New England took care of that, and to focus a hint of Hueffer, we may almost call him a Calvinist dedicated to the contemplative life. Certainly his stories are the work of an artist in Geneva bands.

"He merely gives you material." I can conceive of no better inscription for the grave of a great artist, whose ethics were based on implications drawn from spiritual æsthetics. "Is the act

[1] *Henry James*, 1918, p. 26. (Italics mine.)

beautiful?" he is continually asking, and for him beauty must always have dignity, if it is only the dignity of tragic trivialities. He realizes profoundly that before we can formulate an adequate philosophy, we must have an exact scale of values. To give the English-speaking world such a scale of values was his chief aim. His success rounds out the achievement of his brother William James, and offers America a definite scheme of life.

He is the one detached impersonal social historian on a large scale of our time at its moment of greatest disillusion before the World War, and on the eve of an incalculable but very different future. If it is objected that the world he depicts is limited to those whom life has treated sumptuously, it may be pointed out that the most fortunate class in any civilization is the one in which spiritual strain is most quickly felt, and that the fifty years preceding 1914 represent such a civilization at its period of greatest strain before dissolution. Moreover, the method of Henry James is an incomparable talisman, which may be applied to any aspect of life or society now that he has shown the way. The fact that Marcel Proust, his only considerable follower, has limited himself to a similar *milieu* is not conclusive evidence that the method can-

not be applied to other layers of modern society.

Mr. Philip Guedalla has remarked somewhere that the books of Henry James may be assigned to three periods,—to James I, to James II, and to the Old Pretender. That is a popular view, but it is a lazy view. As a matter of fact, there are three recognizable stages in his writings, but they represent a definite gain in strength and fineness of texture, and in grasp and subtlety of implication. His so-called obscurity is only a matter of close weaving. We are impatient of counting stitches, and yet this is the only way to weave a durable fabric either in life or in art. It may be pointed out furthermore that James's cumulative sentence structure becomes transparently clear if his work is read aloud. Mr. T. S. Eliot, our best and least appreciated American critic, has been more happy in his judgment: "He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it." [1]

Yet he also had an essentially feminine intelligence. His recognitions are intuitive, but there is a long subconscious process of thought and assessment behind them. When the perception finally comes to him in all its precise power of revelation, we feel that its avenue of approach

[1] *Little Review*, August, 1918, p. 46.

is through an acute sense of touch rather than of sight or hearing, and it is something of this sense which he would add and relate to the vision of his readers. He would train us to put our finger on the object as well as to fix our eye upon it. Life is plastic in so far as it is dynamic, and if the process of education is difficult, it is only through a very great extension of our tactile perceptions that we shall be able to recognize and select instinctively those plastic values whose dynamics the life of the future must control and direct to social ends. What seems hyperæsthesia to us will be a necessity of paramount importance to our descendants if civilization is to work out its ends successfully.

As to the process by which Henry James achieves his effect, he gives us a hint in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. "She (Isabel Archer) sits up, by her dying fire, far into the night under the spell of recognitions on which she finds the last sharpness suddenly wait. It is a representation simply of her motionlessly *seeing*, and an attempt withal to make the mere still lucidity of her act as 'interesting' as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate. It represents, for that matter, one of the identifications dear to the novel-

ist, and even indispensable to him; but it all goes on without her being approached by another person and without her leaving her chair. It is obviously the best thing in the book, but it is only a supreme illustration of the general plan." [1] Substitute Henry James for Isabel Archer, and we have his secret of literary approach. His sense of the value inherent in mere silent seeing without unnecessary action reminds us of Maeterlinck's picture of an old man sitting motionless by the fire dreaming of life and death and love and tragedy. We hear the plucking of taut strings of primal emotion which vibrate slowly into silence leaving a memory behind.

James is not at all interested in "plot," but rather seeks to uncover a palimpsest, stripping off with infinite care the crude picture painted over the original masterpiece of life by convention and vulgarity. His art is therefore a gradual revelation of life rather than an historical progression, and his means is to combine many indirect and subtle points of view as embodied by different characters so that they converge into a single focus, and the various shafts of light kindle a slowly increasing warmth which finally pervades his

[1] New York edition, 1907, iii. xx-xxi.

unified picture. The fewer facts he employs, the better. He realizes that facts, being dead truths, have no power of suggestion, or are points of departure at best. "Nine-tenths of the artist's interest in them is that of what he shall add to them and how he shall turn them." [1] Moreover, as a corollary to his avoidance of facts, we may notice how completely his art is based upon neutral tones, and this despite the fact that as a painter he is preoccupied with light rather than with line. His lines are cross-hatchings to provide contrast by shadow, and it is on contrast that he continually insists as the only legitimate means of revelation.

He would have us profit by the present place and opportunity and time. "The author . . . has in any case felt it . . . quite his least stupid course to meet halfway as it were, the turn taken and the perceptions engendered by the tenor of his days. Here it is that he has never pretended to go 'behind'—which would have been for him a deplorable waste of time. The thing of profit is to *have* your experience—to recognize and understand it, and for this almost any will do; there being surely no absolute ideal about it beyond getting from it all it has to give. The artist . . .

[1] *Works*, New York edition, 1908, xii. ix.

has but to have his honest sense of life to find it fed at every pore even as the birds of the air are fed." [1] So, in contrast to Balzac who drew types from all social classes to represent every passion, James believed, and rightly, that a single field of human life, if worked upon carefully, could supply the widest range necessary. As Mr. Hueffer says: "A scientist has a perfect right—nay more, it is the absolute duty of the scientist—to limit his observations to the habits of lepidoptera, or to the bacilli of cancer, if he does not feel himself adapted for enquiry into the habits of bulls, bears, elephants, or foxes." [2]

His continual stress upon the value of "intelligence" is often irritating to his readers, until they realize that for him it is a convenient synonym for insight. His similar stress upon little unregarded things has been likened to the labor of an elephant picking up peas, but the truth of the matter is of course that pearls covered with dust may easily be mistaken for peas. His apparent passion for surfaces is merely a desire to remove the dust, and to permit the light to play upon the pearls once more. No man has less interest in the

[1] Preface to *Lady Barbarina*, London edition, 1922, p. ix.
[2] *Henry James*, 1918, p. 47.

picturesque for its own sake, or in "local color." He searches rather for light, knowing that illumination will render any sight picturesque. And the illumination he would shed is designed to reveal to America Europe's finished technique of living, and to reveal to Europe America's fresh invigorating innocence in accepting life.

Behind the outward ease of an accepted man of the world, to whom all doors are open and whose every curiosity has its means of complete satisfaction, we may discern a darker, but much nobler picture, in which life acts out its puppet show of tragic trivialities with a desperate and magnificent courage, even as the chief actor, while obliterating himself from the scene, may be heard to murmur with Andrew Marvell,

> "But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near."

His tales are waking dreams, and looked at closely, escapes from a nightmare of fear concealed by a smile and by magnificent, though quiet, acting. The waking dreams themselves which his stories mirror are haunting ghost stories of the ideal.

I cannot see for my part how the man's secret

has escaped every eye. He is terribly afraid, yet he will not flinch. He is really living as dangerously as he can, while building a great fortress to repel the enemy. Did he not know that somehow all security was bankrupt, and that civilization was toppling? Yes, he knew it profoundly, if in part subconsciously, and he wished to leave a record of its finer moments. His sense of the past rang down the curtain of an age. He gathered all the best that it had to offer, focusing it quietly in a faultless picture with all the tenderness and pity that a man could confer upon it, and there was little recognition and no applause.

The life he pictured is dead and buried now, and there can be no resurrection. But from the record he left, a course may be charted, and that course indicates the way the Western World must follow if it is to realize the hopes and ideals it once entertained.

CHAPTER VIII

ALDRICH, STOCKTON, BUNNER AND OTHERS

William Dean Howells (1837-1920) who was a decorous follower of Henry James, as a novelist, also published four volumes of short stories. Of these, *Questionable Shapes* and *Between the Dark and the Daylight* still have some interest. These stories are sufficiently anæmic and tenuous, to be sure, and they lead to no particular conclusion, but their subject matter faintly and a little naïvely foreshadows our present preoccupation with abnormal psychology. I dare say that Howells did not esteem them very much, and they add nothing to his somewhat undervalued art. Aldrich, Stockton, and Bunner, who represent a similar tradition, are less important than Howells in the history of American fiction, but in the short story they far surpass him.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836-1907) for example, occupies at present a place of considerable critical esteem, from which I suspect that time will gently dislodge him. He was a child of good

fortune and almost a spoilt child of Boston, which adopted him with great kindness and in the course of time permitted him to succeed to the rulership of its literary estate. "Though I am not genuine Boston, I am Boston-plated," he used to remark in later life,[1] and for him Boston meant Beacon Hill. The welcome Boston gave him as a young man was the fulsome welcome of a provincial coterie, and the condition of his success in this environment was that he must share its admirations as well as its prejudices. In Boston, it is still unkind, and hence discourteous, to apply exacting literary standards to one's contemporaries, and even so fine an artist as Henry James was deprecating to the last degree in commenting upon the writings of his friends.

Aldrich in 1866 had published a delicately sentimental story called *Père Antoine's Date-Palm*, which has charm, but which is very slight, and this is how Boston welcomed it in the person of Mrs. Hawthorne: "I do not believe that in the English language there is anything more delicate, tender, arch, and spherical in rounded beauty. It is as ethereal as a snowflake, and as radiant as those rosy blossoms of the tropical plant which resemble

[1] Greenslet. *The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich*, 1908, p. 78.

snowflakes in form, as they tremble upon their cobwebby fibers and seem to the eye falling through the air. One so seldom finds such sobriety and purity of composition. I want more and more forever of just such gems of art." [1] And she goes on to say a great deal more in the same Della Cruscan vein, concluding that if she were wealthy, she would "bind it in purple velvet edged with diamonds and gild the leaves with solid gold." Yet Sophia Hawthorne was a normal and charming woman, to whom we directly owe the best part of a great artist's achievement. It only serves to show how perilous to the sincerity of an artist the atmosphere of literary Boston was.

Aldrich conformed dutifully, and, so far as we can perceive, quite sincerely. He was duly confident of Longfellow's greatness, and he shrank in the most approved manner from Henry James and Poe and Whitman and Lanier. "The persons in James's book affect me like a lot of admirably 'made-up' actors in the green-room waiting for their cue. *Au reste*, I greatly admire Henry James." [2] "Whitman's manner is a hollow affectation, and represents neither the man nor the

[1] Ibid. pp. 84-5.
[2] Ibid. p. 134.

time. As the voice of the 19th century, he will have little significance in the 21st. That he will outlast the majority of his contemporaries, I haven't the faintest doubt—but it will be in a glass case or a quart of spirits in an anatomical museum." [1] "I don't believe there are five critics who would rank him (Lanier) with Poe, Bryant, Emerson, Whittier, and Lowell. (I mention Poe, though I've an idea that if Poe had been an exemplary, conventional, tax-oppressed citizen, like Longfellow, his few poems, as striking as they are, would not have made so great a stir." [2]

I think we have a fair idea of what to expect from Aldrich now, but let him emphasize the provincial note of New England to the last degree. "A single drop of pure Yankee blood is richer than a thousand urnfuls [*sic*] of Greek dust." [3] Finally, hearken to the distilled essence of Boston prejudice: "A certain Arabian writer, called Rudyard Kipling, described exactly the government of every city and town in the (then) United States when he described that of New York as being 'a despotism of the alien, by the alien, for

[1] Ibid. pp. 138-9.
[2] Ibid. pp. 214-15.
[3] Ibid. p. 139.

the alien, tempered with occasional insurrections of decent folk.'" [1] When we observe such spiritual and literary myopia as that to which these passages bear testimony, we recall another remark of a certain Arabian writer: "It's clever, but is it art?"

Aldrich's official biographer confesses that in writing of his prose, he is "a little conscious of putting the best foot foremost," [2] and I may perhaps be pardoned if I attempt to rectify the critical scales. Because *Marjorie Daw* is flawless and unique, and two or three other stories by Aldrich are rather good Dresden ware, we must not be led to regard his prose as a minor American classic. Most of his short stories are pure sleight of hand and, once we know the formula, not specially deft. They show endless formal care for tiny felicities, but Aldrich never succeeds in concealing his art, nor indeed is he at any particular pains to do so.

Furthermore he is largely responsible for the present vogue of the surprise ending, whose defect is that it can never give pleasure in the same short story twice. Aldrich's preoccupation with this trick did not make for spontaneity. "It would

[1] Ibid. p. 169.
[2] Ibid. p. 244.

interest nobody," he writes, "to know that I always write the last paragraph first, and then work directly up to that, avoiding all digressions and side issues." [1] When a writer makes this confession, we know that his art is not unfolding naturally in the sunlight and the open air. Aldrich's craftsmanship is somewhat more than competent, but it is a sterile craftsmanship of surface arabesques. He held himself aloof from life and showed little human sympathy. The thin lips curl a little when the personal values have not entirely escaped into a land of sentimentality. He gave the American short story finish, but the veneer in his own work hardly serves to conceal the grain. A sterile culture cannot afford lacquer. As the years go by, its poverty becomes all the more obvious, and its pretensions seem merely genteel. Compare *Two Bites at a Cherry* and *Mademoiselle Olympe Zabriski* with Daudet's *Lettres de Mon Moulin*, and my point will be clear.

We may report somewhat more favorably of Frank Richard Stockton (1834-1902), whose whimsicality has more body than that of Aldrich, and whose play of fancy is as much more fresh and varied as it is less pretentious. *The Lady or*

[1] Prose Works: *Ponkapog Papers.* ix. 30.

the Tiger? was the story which won him the suffrage of the American public, but it is by no means the best of which Stockton proved himself capable. He wrote too many books, and appears to have had little power of self-criticism, and yet there was a vitality and unconquerable courage about the man which held him to a certain level of achievement, and permitted him to rise higher rather frequently. His paradoxes have a subtle philosophy of their own, which amounts to a significant criticism of life, and in a different environment, I suspect that he might have surpassed Stevenson. He would certainly have equaled him.

As it is, he is the American peer of Gilbert, and his satires written a generation ago are still fresh and still applicable. Why he did not write poetry is a mystery, for he had a definite vision of beauty and a wistful charm which is by no means so fragile as it is frequently represented to be. He has not yet come into his own, and the significance of his talent is unlikely to be adequately realized until a wise selection has been made from his large output. I believe that enough material could be found for half a dozen volumes which would earn a genuine, if a trifle qualified, permanence of esteem.

Stockton was inclined to the surprise ending as well as Aldrich, but with him it is not an end in itself. Every incident in his stories is a gentle surprise, at which we fancy that he wonders rather more than the reader, and the ending is less of a sudden climax than a quiet logical resolution of strange affairs in the land of Cockaigne. His kinship is with the Brueghels and the Flemish primitives, and in another age he might have painted the delightful old Italian panorama of the monks of the Thebaid which now hangs in the Uffizi. He saw life as a fairy tale with a gentle, but fairly conclusive philosophy, and if he was not a dynamic artist, he was a ripe humanist whose general optimism does not predicate perfectibility. Moreover, no other writer of fairy tales has given the fantastic such an air of verisimilitude, and the lucidity of his logic as he applies it to preposterous situations is unfailing in its candor. He gave the America of his day precisely the romance which it was capable of assimilating healthily, and in this he was without pretensions and by so much the finer artist. It may be added in passing that most aspects of his talent are revealed in the three collections entitled *The Lady or the Tiger?*,

The Bee-Man of Orn and *The Christmas Wreck* respectively.

Henry Cuyler Bunner (1855-1896), on the other hand, is beginning to suffer like Aldrich from a lessening of critical esteem. His *vers de société* ranks at its best with that of Locker-Lampson, if hardly with that of Praed and Dobson, and his short stories have gained not quite legitimately by the association. They have much the same qualities as those of Aldrich in their surface pathos and sentimentality, but they seem to me to be essentially paste, synthetic diamonds which require the illusory effect of artificial light in order that they may appear at their best. They glitter rather than glow, and in sunlight their appeal is seen to be meretricious.

Bunner's fine sense of form and his ability to condense all the essentials of a situation into a few telling lines is undeniable. Like Aldrich, he has been to school under Daudet and Merimée and Maupassant, but he has learned their tricks rather than sought to value the substance of their art. He would readily have endorsed Aldrich's superficial comment: "French novels with metaphysical or psychological prefaces are always

certain to be particularly indecent."[1] *Short Sixes* and his other collections are, after all, very small beer, and it required a dusty civilization, in which the shabby gentility of fastidious rejections passed for culture, to acclaim these stories as masterpieces and their author as a great artist. Short stories are not quatrains, and even if they were, few short story writers can claim to be Landors. Bunner's very superficial intelligence reveals no valuable aspect of life to the American consciousness. It is legitimate for an artist to carve cherry-stones, but he must give those cherry-stones the significance of life if his carvings are to be remembered. Moreover, the greater number of Bunner's stories are cherry-stones carved by machine process to the single pattern which his earlier hand craftsmanship had worked out to his own satisfaction and that of his readers. Aldrich, as I have pointed out, developed the surprise ending. With Bunner, it became a hobby which he rode relentlessly in the dusty heat of the day. He was a hardworking journalist, and his stories are journalism. The way was now practically clear for "O. Henry." Richard Harding Davis was soon to remove the only obstructions. Bun-

[1] Prose Works: *Ponkapog Papers*. ix. 12.

ner, however, can teach his successors economy and also that exact sense of focus which is so rare in the short stories of our time.

Brander Matthews, whose *Vignettes of Manhattan* and *Outlines in Local Color* were much admired in their day, seeks to mirror the diverse aspects of New York life of a generation ago. I mention his work here for its formal technical correctness, which may have some value for the student. The stories however are pressed flowers without fragrance or color, and from them we should not suspect that their author has made the finest critical contribution that I know to the technique of our subject in his essay on *The Philosophy of the Short Story*. Since that essay appeared, the short story has evolved new and legitimate forms of which Mr. Matthews has not taken account, but his fundamental thesis is not likely to be dislodged, although time and experience may supplement it in many novel and surprising ways.

In some degree, the work of all these writers represents a timid flight from reality which suggests a horse-car ride into a new suburb where there is a great deal of jerrybuilding going on. The "open car ride" was a favorite summer diver-

sion of city-dwellers in the '90's, and it was felt that it provided all the romance necessary to round out a Sunday's decorous entertainment. One jogged on slowly with many stops and much jingling of bells, and the fare was a slight expense. It was the recognized custom, moreover, to return on the same car. In Boston, one obtained the same pleasure at less expense by sitting in the Public Garden among the formal flower-beds and contemplating with Aldrich or Howells the statues of Boston's great men towering in noble attitudes. It was fitting that, next to the equestrian statue of the Father of His Country, the most elaborate monument in these gardens should be a memorial fountain to the discoverer of ether as an anæsthetic.

CHAPTER IX

THE EARLY REGIONALISTS

We have seen in our study of Bret Harte how largely his great popular success was due to the fact that he introduced to Eastern readers a new pioneer life full of color and romantically strange. It is not surprising that his success, together with the newly awakened national consciousness of our people after the Civil War, prompted many writers to seek the individual significance which life itself could not give them in differentiating place from place by local color, and in separating man from man by portraying quaintness and eccentricity. The desire may have been laudable, and the impulse was no doubt inevitable, but local color and quaintness soon came to be sought as an end rather than a means, and the very words now suggest romantic escape from a gray reality.

To impute such exaggerated significance to local color implies a superficial attitude of mind. Where life has a certain Elizabethan quality, as

in Bret Harte's California, the color is of vital contribution to our sense of an active and seething life. Elsewhere, when it becomes the end and aim of a story, action tends to find its significance weakened, and character becomes simply stereotyped or disappears. "Local" is a word which totally excludes "universal," and the local story which claims to be nothing more can only survive its day in the place where it still appeals to local sympathies. The local stories of Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, are quite as good as the best stories of our own day which lean heavily upon local color, yet what Californian or Southerner or Englishman could take special pleasure in them to-day?

Local color had, and still has, its value. It makes for tradition, and it interprets one section of America to another. But as soon as it becomes imitative, or as soon as it becomes an end in itself, sentimentality appears and also the parochial mind, and traditions which have special value become mere collectors' trophies with an artificial valuation set upon them far beyond their intrinsic worth. These local color stories are passive reading. They neither stir the emotions very deeply nor exercise the mind.

And they are not memorable unless the background serves to heighten by contrast the significant actions of men and women reacting upon one another. They foreshadow the motion picture of to-day, in which actors are counters, and the background is everything. Finally, it may be pointed out in all diffidence that excessive preoccupation with local color implies the lack of any really rich background of tradition. Where local color is genuine and a vital part of the life of the community, it is more or less unconscious, and finds its true outlet in living rather than in clamoring to be photographed.

With this qualification which implies no censure of the writers now to be considered, we may recognize the importance of the early regionalists who sought to chronicle local aspects of American life between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War.

George Washington Cable (1844 ——) is one of the best of these writers, and the publication of *Old Creole Days* (1879) marked a significant date. He was thirty-five years of age when it appeared, and had been writing these quiet chronicles of Louisiana Creole life for many

years in leisure hours after his day's labors as a clerk in a New Orleans business house were ended. He had read much and dreamed more, and patiently little by little he had written down a few tales of the French people whom he knew. The style was subtly personal in its flavor, and he made no bid for popular esteem. But a few readers responded to the quiet glow of these tales as they appeared one by one at rare intervals in *Scribner's Monthly*, and when they were collected into a volume, the public response was genuine and warm. Although he added slightly to this collection in after years, few American writers have been more reticent and fastidious, and as a short story writer he offers us only eight brief chronicles.

While many literary influences must have contributed to the elaboration of this colorful exotic book, they are all fused in a personal utterance that is unique in its apparently unstudied gentle poignancy. The quality of sentiment is eminently Southern, yet Cable's discretion preserves him from sentimentality. He is a late eighteenth century man of feeling who has not forgotten the "peace of the Augustans," and their sober sense of form. And he is also a modern man who

prefers to evoke as a romantic rather than to state as a classic. In fact, *Old Creole Days* weds romantic feeling and classical form. The style, if it has a defect, may be slightly overluscious. There is a Southern languor in the telling, and an occasional deliberate quaintness not altogether concealed. But the style has body where Aldrich and Bunner are evanescent, and *Old Creole Days* is as satisfying a collection as any that appeared between the death of Lincoln and the Spanish-American War.

Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) is equally satisfactory, and may take her place in this chronicle as the best of the New England regionalists. The body of her contribution to the American short story is much larger than that of Cable, and exhibits a wider range of interest. The daughter of a country doctor, she accompanied as a child her father on his rounds, and in her gentle reticent mind stored up the impressions which she was to record later with a slightly hesitant art. Her style has been likened to that of Hawthorne which it superficially resembles, but in recalling her better stories we realize that their charm is that of a mild Indian summer of golden sunlight on russet leaves, while that of Hawthorne recalls the

reflective glow of smoldering fire in autumn after the leaves have fallen. She is a pastoral poet in prose who is entirely content with simple familiar things, and the tragedy of New England which is seldom hidden is reconciled to life by dumb acceptance, and subdued to the light which transfigures it very gently. Although that life is already dim and a little spectral, she has caught its beauty and transferred it to the page before it is too late, and the gentle melancholy of the picture forbears to pass judgment upon what her eyes have seen. It is the best side of New England which she records, and much is missing that later chroniclers have set down. We do not, however, reproach Miss Mitford for not seeing what Mrs. Gaskell and others have recorded. In like manner, we may turn to Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and others for the harsher aspects of New England reality.

Miss Jewett achieved a style as personal as that of Cable, and was equally successful in concealing her literary influences. These were various and catholic enough, ranging from Hawthorne and the Caroline poets to Italian *novelle* and Addison and Steele. Her self-contained reticence is an English inheritance half-forgotten, though

remembered in the presence of other races. Between these quiet lines we may often read a great deal which has been left unspoken, and here and there a philosophy of writing may be gathered from her pages. "One is shown over many a house in these days," she writes, for example, "where the interest may be more complex, but not more definite." [1] Henry James, we may remember, suggests that the modern short story may be either a picture or an anecdote. Miss Jewett, as well as he, would express her preference for the picture. And there along the Maine coast, which we know so well after reading her stories, with its stony precipitous land, its very walls of stone hedging stony fields, its gray inlets with bursts of sunlight over the wind-driven salt spray, its little white houses, and its tiny human havens, she brooded during "those long hours when nothing happened except the growth of herbs and the course of the sun," [2] and distilled the pungent fragrance of simple things into faithful chronicles and little sunny vignettes. She takes us into her intimate friendly confidence, and the landscape is a subtle background in gentle

[1] *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 1910, p. 201.
[2] *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 1910, p. 208.

shadow for the little pastoral plays she has witnessed and set down. Many writers have followed her in recording New England life. None has maintained so even and so high a level of quiet permanent distinction.

Charles Egbert Craddock (1850-1922), as Mary Noailles Murfree was generally known to the public, marked another important milestone in regionalist writing by the publication of *In the Tennessee Mountains* in 1884. While the folklore of the Appalachian mountaineers, with its primitive vendettas and its wealth of traditional and unspoiled English folk-song and Elizabethan speech, has found many later chroniclers, Charles Egbert Craddock was the pioneer and may still claim the finest literary achievement. Her first volume was an instantaneous success, and was followed by many others which fall not much below the standard she set by *In the Tennessee Mountains.* Yet this book, if carefully studied, contains the substance of her contribution, and it is of no mean value, though inferior to *Old Creole Days.*

The debt to Bret Harte was obvious at once, and the book's reception rivaled that of *The Luck of Roaring Camp.* It satisfied alike the craving

for realism and the craving for romance. Its use of dialect was an innovation, and the new dangerous life which it portrayed offered an opportunity of romantic escape that was eagerly grasped. Yet it was felt that these stories were faithfully set down. While the reader today is conscious that Miss Murfree was a somewhat condescending outsider, we suspect that her detachment from her subject and her manner of reporting it to her contemporaries made her seem nearer to them and flattered their self-esteem. As a novelist, she failed as signally as Bret Harte. As a short story writer, posterity is likely to acknowledge her historical significance and to value less and less her artistic achievement, which nevertheless was creditable enough.

Octave Thanet (1850 ——), whose name in private life is Alice French, occupies a similar position. The body of her work is as sound as that of Charles Egbert Craddock, although no one volume stands out and calls for particular mention. The pursuit of local color was now in full cry, and Octave Thanet successfully preëmpted a claim on the canebrakes of Arkansas. Her observation is minute rather than keen, her dialect studied rather than spontaneous. Once more we

have a writer who is a sign of the times rather than an original talent. Her stories, however, are still very readable.

Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) is a rather more significant figure. His reputation rests on two achievements. First of all, the Uncle Remus books are a wonderful storehouse of negro folklore and dying tradition vitalized in the talk of an unforgettable old man, and secondly, in *Mingo* and other stories Harris has rendered with the sympathetic recognition of experience that Tennessee mountain life which appealed to Charles Egbert Craddock only as a detached observer. The second achievement is in some danger of being forgotten, or at least unduly overshadowed by the engaging figure of Uncle Remus. The first is as inalienable a possession of childhood as *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gulliver's Travels.* Moreover, it gave an impetus to the study of dialect which produced much valuable work by other writers.

Uncle Remus is the typical negro of the Georgia plantation, kindly, humorous, imaginative, and sententious. He is the embodiment of all that the negro has contributed to American culture, and in the animal epic whose episodes he relates after much teasing to a little white boy is

implied a whole philosophy of life as implicitly and ironically as in *Reinhard Fuchs*. The history of the short story has involved many strange juxtapositions, but none, I think, so strange as the traceable indebtedness of the author of *The Jungle Books* to the creator of Uncle Remus. As a skilful producer of marionette plays may confer tragic and comic reality upon his puppets, so that the face of Punch is at one time nonchalant and at another time tragic, so Uncle Remus, who became at last identical with Joel Chandler Harris, confers intimate human reality upon Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox as we follow them upon their adventures.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) who, as William Dean Howells pointed out, was the first negro writer "to feel the negro life æsthetically and to express it lyrically," [1] is best known for his dialect poetry. Yet he achieved a certain synthesis in the interpretations of negro character published in *The Strength of Gideon* (1900). While the volume is of hardly more than historical interest, it should be mentioned here as the only direct negro contribution to American fiction, with the exception of Chesnutt's faithful realism.

Richard Malcolm Johnston (1822-1898),

[1] Introduction to *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, 1896.

though he had been writing for a generation his harsh realistic studies and sketches of Georgia country life, and though he had published *Georgia Sketches* as early as 1864, may more conveniently be noticed here, as his public recognition may hardly be said to have come until *Dukesborough Tales* was reprinted in New York in 1883. The Civil War and reconstruction intervened and account for his long obscurity, until the reawakened national consciousness interested in local color brought him a qualified esteem which time will probably heighten. If his range is narrow, his wisdom is keen, and it would do no harm to reprint a selection at least from these acidly bitter sketches. While conforming to no modern tailor-made standards, they have a certain restricted life of their own.

Constance Fenimore Woolson (1838-1894) is more difficult to classify. As a regionalist, her special field is the shore of the Great Lakes. But she also wrote creditable stories of indeterminate setting, tales of reconstruction days of the South, and vividly realized pictures of Italian life. It is on the shores of Lake Superior, however, and among the French *habitants* that she sets the scene of her most characteristic stories.

She does not always avoid the reproach of sentimentality, and she was influenced by every fashion to achieve admirable pastiche, so that influences as diverse as those of Bret Harte and Rose Terry Cooke and Henry James have deeply affected her. And yet this baffling transitional figure somehow commands our respect, so that we believe in her accomplishment, and feel that in a more settled environment which had long racial memories and a more implicit culture, she might have gone very far indeed.

When we come to Hamlin Garland (1860 ——), we know quite definitely where we stand. His short stories are chiefly to be found in *Main-Travelled Roads* and *Other Main-Travelled Roads*, and he has most minutely told us the story of his life in *A Son of the Middle Border* and *A Daughter of the Middle Border*. Few American writers of our time have had such a consuming desire to express the life they knew, and few have shown more fidelity in the rendering of it. Garland's theme is the pioneer settlement life of the Middle Border, and he depicts it in all its harshness, and with an impartial objectivity that is impressive. His books have exceptional historical value, for his candor is as extreme as his style is bald and

undemonstrative. These narratives are only excelled in their generation by E. W. Howe's strangely forgotten *Story of a Country Town.* No reader unfamiliar with their environment would question their authenticity for a moment.

Garland is careful with his dialect, and does not lay stress upon it for its own sake. His aim is precise photography of significant moments, and it must be confessed that his art hardly transcends his material. We feel that he is more important for us than for foreign readers. His stories are provincial in outlook, and if we read *A Son of the Middle Border,* we shall see that the Augustanism of Boston rather dazzled the young man to whom the generosity of Howells and others had opened a new world. I am inclined, nevertheless, to think that *Main-Travelled Roads* is the touchstone of a period, and that Garland's courage and veracity made the path of many artists who followed him easier to tread. Certainly, the reader will find in these stories our characteristic regionalism at its best.

Next to Hamlin Garland, and in her earlier books not inferior to him, stands Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1862——) whose reputation is likely

to suffer from her overproduction, but whose best books, such as *A Humble Romance* (1887) and *A New England Nun* (1891), render with a certain finality the grimmer aspects of New England life. Her stories stand out in contrast to those of Sarah Orne Jewett by their stark and bitter naturalism, limited, to be sure, by the prudish conventions of the time, yet by no means hesitant or flattering to New England. Mrs. Freeman's regionalism is as definite as that of her contemporaries, and much less of an end in itself. Her early stories appear to have aroused less opposition than those of Hamlin Garland, and yet they are quite as pitilessly mordant. They form as complete a study of suppressed desires as Sherwood Anderson's stories, but somehow they fail in their desperate reality to offer a solution, or even to plumb the essential depths of knowledge, the first step necessary toward spiritual liberation. Perhaps it is because they came too soon. America had not begun to question. We perceive the unhappiness, and it is still dumb.

Yet it is hard to forget such tales as *A Village Lear* and *A New England Nun*. Henry James, writing to Sir George Henschel in 1895, says:

"I hate 'old New England stories'!—which are lean and pale and poor and ugly." [1] Well, these stories *are* "lean and pale and poor and ugly," but so is the life which they reflect. At their best, there is no poverty of statement or understanding, and they could hardly be more poignantly realized. There is, to be sure, in Mrs. Freeman's later work, a poverty of resource. She had found a successful formula, and exhausted it by endless repetition. It is customary to compare the stories of her first two collections to those of Guy de Maupassant, but this is hardly fair to either writer. Mrs. Freeman has left too much unsaid, and moreover she has neither Maupassant's economy of line nor his flashing directness of climax and sudden revelation. On the other hand, she has a sense of background and communal relationship where Maupassant is deficient, and such art as she possesses is not openly displayed.

She can use symbolism to good ironic effect, as in *Old Lady Pingree* where "straight from the door, on this side of the old house, an avenue of pine-trees led to a hen-coop." [2] And she can sum up a whole story in a sentence or two, as in

[1] *Letters*, 1920, i. p. 236.
[2] *A Humble Romance*, 1915, p. 149.

the closing paragraph of the same story: "Nancy watched them as they went down the path. 'I wonder,' said she, 'if they are any happier thinkin' about gettin' married than I am thinkin' about gettin' buried?' "[1] More often in her later books, we feel that she has been reading Hardy to good effect, while missing the deeper ironies, and in recent years the passion of editors for a happy ending has frequently neutralized the value of her work. It has also not been remarked, I think, how her interest is almost exclusively preoccupied with women, and this fact has influenced unhappily a great many imitative writers whose work has taken protective coloration from a study of her method.

Several minor story-writers of this transitional period, who were more or less preoccupied with regionalism, may pass in brief review. Philander Deming, who is now forgotten, earned measured esteem by his *Adirondack Tales* (1880) and by *Tompkins, and Other Folks* (1885). He never acquired full control of his medium, but he was somewhat more than competent, and sketched various foibles of human nature with a more or less successful pen.

[1] Ibid. p. 163.

Mary Hartwell Catherwood, who is more undeservedly forgotten, wrote of the French settlements on the Great Lakes, with considerable romantic charm and with a dramatic sense which is as evident in her short stories as in her novels. Several of her tales deserve to be reprinted, at least in anthologies, and *The Chase of St. Castine* marked something of a date upon its publication in 1894.

James Lane Allen (1849——) has all the trappings of Hardy without the substance, and yet *Flute and Violin* (1891) was hailed as a masterpiece upon its appearance, and still has power to hold the reader who accepts the author's valuation of its substance. The vice of the book is its fine writing and sentimentality: its virtue lies wholly in its power to evoke landscape, and to set puppets against an elemental sky. Most of Allen's contemporaries faltered and hesitated. The assurance of *Flute and Violin* seemed to suggest a writer of authority, and it is not surprising that the public was deceived. Certainly few writers of the time were more conscientious, but art cannot afford to be magisterial, and sounding periods cannot long conceal an utter lack of insight into human nature. Moreover, Allen's

didacticism is as forced as his sentiment, and the labored artificiality of his style is eventually as irritating as that of *Euphues*. Speaking of a later book, *The Bride of the Mistletoe*, Edward Garnett has pointed out that "When Maupassant advises the young writer not to reason overmuch, he implies that the force of the thing in itself and of its atmosphere, which art conveys, is impaired by any obtrusive desire of a writer to play Providence to his readers." [1] The author of *Flute and Violin* is omniscient and omnipotent over his characters, and such pontifical high seriousness does not serve to conceal the poverty of his insight or the falsity of his sentiment. A fair critical touchstone might be the ability to perceive the essential morbidity of *Flute and Violin* and the essential health of *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Will Allen Dromgoole's collection, *The Heart of Old Hickory* (1895), is a quiet and faithful record of life in Tennessee. It has never won the public it deserves, for Miss Dromgoole's blended humor and pathos are unpretentiously good. Her range is wide, her powers of description subtle.

Margaret Deland's (1857 ——) reputation as a short story writer largely depends upon *Old*

[1] *Friday Nights*, 1922, p. 266.

Chester Tales (1898), although this volume has been followed by other collections of stories. Gentle sentiment, quiet portraiture, and evasion of life are her characteristic qualities, together with a certain gift for placid narrative and an easy felicity of style.

Much more significant are the tales of Pennsylvania German life by Georg Schock (1877 ——) as Katharine Riegel Loose prefers to be known. Contributed to the files of *Harper's Magazine* after 1900, they have considerable psychological subtlety and dramatic power. I am not aware that they have been collected into volumes, but the best of them should certainly be preserved. Georg Shock has reticence, dignity, and force, and ranks among the best of our local artists.

Kate Chopin's (1851-1904) delicate studies of Creole life are not inferior to those of Cable. *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897) have Gallic economy and humor, deft psychology and restrained incisiveness. I suspect that Miss Chopin's work is yet to come into its own. Her pastels are narrow enough in their range, but faultless in the attainment of their end. Moreover, she could gather a whole drama into one quiet little final sentence, as practically none of

the so-called masters of the surprise ending can pretend to do.

Grace King (1852 ——) is the third chronicler of Louisiana. Her art has more body, and no less subtlety, than that of Cable and Miss Chopin, but is more diffused. She gives us the memory of a period seen through a melancholy haze. As a chronicler of manners and a careful stylist, she is entitled to much esteem, and her sentiment is not overemphasized, an unusual distinction in a Southern writer. *Monsieur Motte* (1888) is not less excellent than *Stories of a Time and Place* (1892) and *Balcony Stories* (1893).

James Weber Linn (1876 ——) and Harry Stilwell Edwards (1855 ——) call for mention, at least. The former published a notable story of the Southwest in *The Girl at Duke's* [1] (1903): the latter, many tales of negro life which fall not very far short of those by Joel Chandler Harris. The best stories by Edwards are to be found in *Two Runaways* (1889) and *His Defense* (1899).

Gertrude Atherton, who very nearly achieved a masterpiece in her novel *Rezanov,* communicates much of the stir and romantic color of California

[1] Reprinted by R. L. Ramsey in *Short Stories of America,* 1921, p. 213.

to the reader in *The Splendid Idle Forties* (1902). Special attention may be directed to *The Pearls of Loreto* in that volume. Her most memorable tale, however (and it is one of the best short stories of our time) is *The Sacrificial Altar* (1916), reprinted only in *The Best Short Stories of 1916.*

After Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Alice Brown (1857 ——) is probably the best living writer of New England short stories. Her point of view is midway between that of Sarah Orne Jewett and that of Mrs. Freeman. She has a more personal and easy style than the latter, a sharper dramatic sense than the former. At her best, as in *Meadow Grass* (1895) and *Tiverton Tales* (1899), she succeeds in communicating the sentiment of New England country life admirably; at her weakest, sentiment softens into sentimentality. Like Mrs. Freeman, her art has suffered from overproduction and a tendency to repeat successful and popular patterns, and her substance in later years has frequently been tenuous enough. On the other hand, her range is wider than regionalism, and she has published many closely-woven psychological studies with other backgrounds than New England in which the influence of Henry James has been a happy one. Moreover, in such a story

as *The Flying Teuton* in the volume of that name (1918), she has added a new legend to American literature which is unlikely to be forgotten soon.

Less significant for this history are the names of Francis Marion Crawford (1854-1909), who is a regionalist only by courtesy, and of Francis Hopkinson Smith (1838-1915). Both won a reputation by their novels, and reinforced it somewhat by their short stories. The former was a born story-teller who wrote simply to amuse. He has verve, pungency, color, and ease, but does not rise above a moderate level of creditable attainment. His fiction has no roots, and betrays a sterile cosmopolitanism, but he is always entertaining and frequently shrewd.

F. Hopkinson Smith is equally cosmopolitan and equally vivacious, but in *Colonel Carter of Cartersville* (1891), which is really a long short story, he has created a character, and if Colonel Carter is a conventionalized Virginia gentleman, he is at least persuasive. Characteristic collections of his animated improvisations are to be found in *A Day at Laguerre's* (1892) and *At Close Range* (1905).

Thomas Nelson Page (1853 ——) merits considerable esteem for the short stories collected

under the title of *In Ole Virginia* (1887-1890), and especially for *Marse Chan,* which is among the most distinguished of Negro dialect stories. He published many other books of conscientious workmanship, but in *Marse Chan* he crystallized for once all that is best and noblest in the South.

Maurice Thompson's *Stories of the Cherokee Hills* which also portray Negro life in the South with much poetic feeling, and Rowland Evans Robinson's collection entitled *Uncle 'Lisha's Shop* (1887) which has much homely Vermont philosophy within its pages, are not negligible, and finally mention should be made of *The Imported Bridegroom, and Other Stories* (1898) by Abraham Cahan (1860——), which is the pioneer collection of stories about Jewish life on the East Side of New York, and reveals a quiet but rich humor and pathos, while sufficiently unstudied in its art.

In this hasty survey of the early regionalists, I have necessarily omitted the names of many writers who were esteemed in their day, but I think the general tendency is clear enough. The significant figures are Cable, Garland, Miss Murfree, Harris, Miss Jewett, Mrs. Freeman, and Miss Brown. The stimulus first aroused by Bret Harte

and increased by the public response to these writers, produced a vast outpouring of regionalist fiction. The tide of local color is to-day on the ebb perhaps, but it is still forceful, and presently we shall study our younger contemporary regionalists and see what conclusions as to the future it is possible to draw from their work.

CHAPTER X

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

So far practically all the writers whom we have considered had produced their most characteristic work before the Spanish-American War. The time was ripe for a change, but the harbingers of that change were condemned to frustration, and it is significant enough that Stephen Crane and Ambrose Bierce still suffer from popular neglect in America, although their art has been long recognized in England.

Had Stephen Crane (1870-1900) lived and been sheltered, it is not only conceivable, but probable, that he would have been a very great artist. As it is, he probably ranks a little below Maupassant and considerably above Kipling. Edward Garnett has related how he picked up recently a first edition of *The Red Badge of Courage* for sixpence shortly before a first edition of *Almayer's Folly* by Joseph Conrad was sold for twelve pounds. "Conrad was also amused when I told him, and we suggested a title for an

allegorical picture yet to be painted—the Apotheosis of an Author crowned by Fashion, Merit, and Midas. For we both had in mind the years when the critics hailed *The Nigger of the Narcissus* as a worthy pendent to the battle-pictures presented in *The Red Badge of Courage*, and when Sir, then Mr. Arthur Quiller-Couch spoke of *The Nigger* as 'having something of Crane's insistence.' "[1]

It has been remarked more than once that when Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* (1896) he had no personal experience of war. And yet no man realized the essential aspects of war more profoundly, nor the psychological effects of war upon the soldier. The hurtling passions of the struggle, pride and fear, exulting triumph and strangled rage, conscious of glory and futility alike, are incomparably realized with youthful intuition and fused into objective unity by an art as inevitable as that of Hardy. When Crane came to England from the Balkans, he said to Joseph Conrad, according to Garnett's report: "My picture of war was all right! I have found it as I imagined it." [2]

[1] *Friday Nights*, 1922, pp. 201-2.
[2] *Friday Nights*, 1922, p. 213.

His poignant realism in *Maggie* (1896) makes that of the Goncourts and Huysmans seem feeble and ineffective. With the steady and remorseless inevitability of blind incurious fate, life crushes the New York street girl, and the story purges our minds with pity and terror as surely and directly as *Œdipus Tyrannus* or *Hecuba.* If these two great little books are not short stories according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, the laws must be changed.

In *The Little Regiment* (1896), *The Open Boat* (1898) and *Wounds in the Rain* (1900), we find Stephen Crane's most mature achievement. He has found an utterly personal style of great distinction, flexible, resilient, grave, mocking, ironic, tragic, shifting its pattern with every turn of life's wheel, and yet uniquely his own in its individual charm. Crane is America's only great honest ironist, and his irony is pitiful and kind. But we are afraid of ironists in America, and equally afraid of passionate life that expresses itself naked and unashamed.

The Third Violet (1897) and *Active Service* (1899) are novels which the reader can afford to neglect, but *George's Mother* (1896) whose realism is but little inferior to that of *Maggie,* and

The Black Riders (1895) and *War Is Kind* (1899), in which all the passionate irony of *The Red Badge of Courage* and *The Open Boat* are expressed in distinguished free verse poems which our imagists have not surpassed, although they are much indebted to them, are among the very few vital books of the period.

The Monster (1899), while a collection of short stories with much subtle psychology, is on the whole inferior to Crane's earlier books, and *Whilomville Stories* (1900) mark a more measurable decline. *Last Words* (1902) may be left to obscurity for the most part, and so may the few new pieces posthumously collected in *Men, Women, and Boats* (1921), although they would have made the reputation of another man. It is scandalous that we have no collected edition of his better work and no biography. Even the editors of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* seem scarcely conscious of his existence, and mention him only to damn *Maggie* and *The Red Badge of Courage* with faint praise. Yet it would seem that a public which responds almost unanimously to Kipling might find something to admire in Crane, who is his superior in very similar qualities. Certainly the man who has

profoundly influenced men as different as Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad should be accessible to his own countrymen.

Signs are not wanting, moreover, that he has had an influence in France. Jules Romains and the other Unanimist writers follow with remarkable closeness in his footsteps. "At the top of the bank the column again halted and rearranged itself, as a man after a climb rearranges his clothing. Presently the great steel-backed brigade, an infinitely graceful thing in the rhythm and ease of its veteran movement, swung up a little narrow, slanting street." [1] "His nerves were so steady that it was as if they had been drawn from his body, leaving him merely a muscular machine; but his numb heart was somehow beating to the pealing march of the fight." [2] "The little sober-hued village had been like the cloak which disguises the king of drama. It was not put aside, and an army, splendid thing of steel and blue, stood forth in the sunlight." [3] These sentences chosen at random from *The Little Regiment* have the very accent of *Le Mort d'un*

[1] *Pictures of War*, London, 1916, p. 11.
[2] Ibid. pp. 20, 21.
[3] Ibid. pp. 23, 24.

Quelqu'un, and if it is a coincidence, it is a remarkable one.

It is this visual sense of war as a steel machine which is recorded in precisely the same terms in the drawings of Wyndham Lewis and the etchings of Nevinson. Had Crane fought in Flanders and survived, he would have been the war's supreme interpreter. As it is, he died at the age of thirty, poor and sick and overdriven by his time, and he is forgotten now while Richard Harding Davis is remembered. He fought in his brief course the battle of the American artist, and his life in that warfare was a triumphant defeat. Let these lines which he penned of other warfare, serve as his epitaph:

"Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind."

"Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,
Little souls who thirst for fight,
These men were born to drill and die.
The unexplained glory flies above them,
Great is the battle-god, and his kingdom—
A field where a thousand corpses lie."

. . . . . .

"Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep.
War is kind." [1]

Jonathan Sturges, who published *The First Supper and Other Episodes*, in 1893, and was an exile in Paris and London, also merits more attention than he has received. The scanty body of his work renders it difficult to foretell what his future might have been, but allowing all that we wish for his unconcealed imitation of Henry James and Walter Pater and Arthur Symons, I think we may allow him a place as a story-teller not so far below that of Dowson and Crackanthorpe. His milieu is that of *The Yellow Book*, and his style is that of the French and English Symbolists, but in *The Moonlighter of County Clare*, he has achieved a masterpiece for once, with a perfectly individual style, and in other stories he has produced atmospheric effects which are altogether admirable. "As they crossed the great crimson river of light which came up Thirty-Third Street, up the hill, from the sky far down there across the river, Vane had begun to speak of the features of a walk on any avenue in a hilly part of the island near sunrise or near sunset; the extraordinarily

[1] *War is Kind*, 1899, p. 1.

rare atmosphere, the clear outlines of the buildings, the long vistas, the surprise of the sudden plunges into the red streams of radiance which ran up every cross street, but which the length of the dark avenue-block between, gave the passer always time to forget." [1] That is authentic, I think, and shows something more than a seeing eye. It would do no harm to reprint *The First Supper* for a new generation.

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?) has perhaps suffered as much from indiscriminate praise in recent years as he suffered during his lifetime from utter neglect. Boycotted by publishers, he was compelled to issue his own books, and he seemed unable to distinguish his masterpieces from the great mass of his utterly worthless journalism. But *In the Midst of Life* (1891) and *Can Such Things Be?* (1894) are two collections of short stories which, for the most part, are very good indeed, and fortunately they have been recently reprinted. *A Horseman in the Sky* and *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, which open the earlier collection, rank indeed among the great short stories of the world. Poe has not surpassed these, and we might easily find a dozen others as

[1] *The First Supper and Other Episodes*, 1893, p. 30.

noteworthy as the best stories of Fitz-James O'Brien, with whose art Ambrose Bierce has much in common.

A restless and easily disheartened man, he had known the California of Bret Harte and Mark Twain, had fought in the Civil War, and had been a literary free lance in London. He was a satirist in an unsatiric age which afforded him no background. Hence his cynicism and secret sense of failure, which is not unlike that of Mark Twain, though he lacks the greater man's human sympathy and prodigious animal spirits. Frustrated as he knew himself to be by life and by the conditions of his time, his values were none the less real, even if he could never quite believe in their transformation into energy. He was a drowning man, we feel, who struggled in the water violently. Over and over he preaches to us from the old text: "In the midst of life we are in death," and he snaps at life half-famished.

Perception of the greater ironies destroys cynicism, and precludes despair. The irony of Cervantes or Hardy may be pessimistic enough, but it implies a grim cosmic humor which is at least æsthetically satisfying. Bierce was utterly lacking in humorous perception, and his self-pity

gnawed at his artistic sincerity, so that he ended as an apostle of nonconformity with no knightly allegiance, and most of his stories have no light other than a dull glow like mahogany reflecting the last dull embers on a fading hearth.

When all has been said, however, by the devil's advocate, the man's uncanny power remains unchallenged, and his subtle craftsmanship, artificial as we may feel it to be, serves perfectly to achieve his ends. We descend with him into a ghastly hell of longing, in which desires themselves freeze in agonizing forms, and horror rules tyrannically over tombs. He insinuates far more than he dares to tell, and the slow relentless cumulative power of his imaginings as they unfold lead inevitably to tremendous climaxes that browbeat us into surrender. He storms the kingdom of art by violence, and the death-rattle of his harsh dry laughter rings long afterward in our ears.

These stories unfold outside any human world we know, in a void without time or space, and he peoples that void with the phantasmagoria of his dreams, releasing the inhibitions which are strangling him so that they may strangle each other, while he flees from his ruined brain. Mono-

maniac art, if you like, but with the abnormal lucidity of madness and the cold intellectual judgment of a man who has a life to avenge.

Harold Frederic followed Ambrose Bierce and Stephen Crane with vivid narratives of the Civil War which may be sampled to best advantage in *The Deserter* (1898). His promise was cut short by an early death, and his best book is a novel, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, but his short stories show a vivid dramatic sense and a keen and colorful style. While they are well constructed and have much sharpness of outline, they do not quite conceal their art, and aim a little too openly at theatrical effectiveness.

Richard Harding Davis (1864-1916), who was the idol of the literary marketplace at this time, was a moon of Kipling who revolved rapidly around a tolerably limited orbit. He was probably the best reporter of his day, and certainly aimed with unusual success at journalistic effectiveness. At his best, he moves with melodramatic swiftness to his end, and is absorbing enough in his photography of outward pageantry. That he was exclusively preoccupied with surfaces and that he had no sense of neutral values is equally clear. He has no significance in this

history as an artist, but he is an important symptom of the disease which has threatened American literature in our time. An engaging and willful child playing with an adoring public, he auctioned off literary old clothes in *Vanity Fair*.

George Ade (1866 ——) and Henry Wallace Phillips (1869 ——), while unpretentious enough in their claims, have each merited esteem by quiet achievement in limited range. Ade as a fabulist and a playwright does not concern us here, but such a collection as *In Babel* (1912) portrays the middle-class life of an American city more or less memorably. In like manner, Phillips reflects one characteristic aspect of American humor very happily indeed in his collection of Western stories entitled *Red Saunders' Pets* (1906).

The life of Jack London (1876-1916), who was potentially a finer artist than any of his contemporaries whom I have just mentioned with the exception of Stephen Crane, is a characteristic story of a success which is a failure. The vitality and curiosity of the man were tremendous, the forceful style and epic subject-matter to his hand equally unique, and yet the blight of commercialism ruined a fine artist. The great financial rewards offered to every American writer with

personal charm and adaptability led him to prostitute his fine talents by writing down to an undiscriminating public which relished melodrama and sought romantic escape from its own inhibitions by reading of marvelous prowess in which brutality passed for strength. He appealed to that characteristic of American city life, and especially of the American business-man, which reminds us all of the small boy who hides from his father behind the barn while he smokes sweet fern cigarettes and reads about the exploits of Jesse James.

London flattered the average man by implying that he was the norm of literary taste to be propitiated at all hazards. Now the average American reader cannot distinguish between orthodoxy and uniformity, and he has been trained to demand uniformity of the artist who seeks to please him. As the essence of art is individuality, the American artist, who seeks the demagogic vote of his countrymen, yields to the pressure at his peril, and Jack London is a signal example of the only too frequent tragedy.

His art, as Edward Garnett points out, is a sort of composite photography in which all individual outlines are blurred in a standardized type.

London is more than half-conscious of the fact, and seeks to achieve the distinctness which he has sacrificed by magnifying the composite photograph to gigantic dimensions. Yet standardized giants are as unsatisfactory as ordinary standardized mortals, and moreover, they are much less credible. The fact remains, none the less, that the gross enlargement of his photograph flatters the average man, even when it is delivered, as Jack London always punctually delivered it, without the frame.

Waldo Frank has related how he wrote to Jack London shortly before his death, asking him to contribute to *The Seven Arts,* as he had been informed by friends that London had written really good stories which the popular magazines did not care to print. London replied that such stories did not exist, and concluded his letter by saying: "I do not mind telling you that, had the United States been as kindly toward the short story writer as France has always been kindly, from the beginning of my writing career I would have written many a score of short stories quite different from the ones I have written." [1]

How bitterly he lamented his spiritual failure

[1] *Our America,* 1919, p. 26, footnote.

is evident in many of his late letters, according to Van Wyck Brooks.[1] As it was, he wrote with vivid immediacy of the surfaces which he knew, and the stormy physical conflicts of his books are but eidola of the great conflict which was raging within his own breast, and in which he was defeated.

A similar story is told in the lives of Morgan Robertson (1861-1915) and Harris Merton Lyon (1883-1916). The sea-stories of Robertson have all the sound and scent of the sea, and there is the same worship of action in them which we find in the tales of Jack London. And yet life conquers him, and if his surrender is much less complete, we feel that his talent is finally atrophied by circumstances. Lyon wrote in obscurity, and published two volumes which I have read long ago, but which I have been unable to procure for the purpose of this history. As I recall them, it seems to me that he did not compromise in these little pictures of life which were graphic enough, but that he never quite succeeded in breaking through the bars of his cage until the end when, poor and dying, he wrote that masterly poetic parable of his

[1] *Civilization in the United States*, 1922, p. 183.

own life, *The Weaver Who Clad the Summer*, which would have been a jewel in Hawthorne's crown had he written it. I like to think that I was permitted to bring a little happiness to Lyon's last days by rescuing this masterpiece from a Sunday newspaper supplement, after every American magazine editor had refused it, and by reprinting it in *The Best Short Stories of 1915*.

Of Viola Roseboro's two contributions to the American short story, her editorial championship of many an unrecognized talent is perhaps the greater, but I think that her book *Players and Vagabonds* (1904) should not pass unnoticed. Its quiet excellence has been overshadowed by the work of many a writer whom she was the first to introduce to the public. Nor should the deft workmanship of Madelene Yale Wynne (1847-1913) be overlooked. Howells, with critical acumen, first perceived the subtle art of *The Little Room and Other Stories* (1895), whose fragrance still lingers for the quiet reader, as well as its ghostly charm.

The name of Norman Duncan (1871-1916) may fittingly close this chapter. His first book, *The Soul of the Street* (1900), (and certain critics

may be defended who have thought it his best), portrayed with much human reality the life of the Syrian quarter in New York. A trip up the Labrador, however, and among the outports of Newfoundland, led to the long series of short stories and episodic novels by which he is best known. Preoccupied as he was with local color and romantic sentiment, he seems nevertheless to have penetrated into the mind of a primitive folk with as much intuitive sympathy, though with less art, than his contemporary in Ireland, John Synge. He really succeeds in telling natural folk-stories, and if his brush is coarse and deals with primary colors only, it is not unsuited, as I can testify from personal knowledge, to the rugged life which he portrays. His virtues are those of Dickens, and so are his faults for the most part, though Dickens was not a Shorter Catechist. While the Biblical diction of his stories lacks the economy of Caradoc Evans, it has more color and human warmth. His psychological range, though limited, is usually genuine, and his simplicity does not strike us as false. Certainly he is never subtle, but his good colloquial prose has grain, and his use of dialect, though somewhat formalized and ornamented, is unusually persuasive. If we set his

best folk-stories of struggle with the elements against the pseudo-epic narratives of Jack London, their superiority is evident. Duncan sought freedom by romantic escape, and it cannot be denied that in the end he found it.

CHAPTER XI

O. HENRY

O. HENRY, as William Sydney Porter preferred to sign himself, is the most representative short story writer of the period which immediately preceded our own, and therefore calls for somewhat more extended critical treatment than we have devoted to subtler artists. Hitherto, it has seemed impossible to hold the critical scales evenly balanced whenever his stories have been a matter of concern. He has been either exhalted to a supreme position at the expense not only of his contemporaries, but of all his predecessors, or he has been dismissed with a patronizing smile as a clever but ephemeral journalist. His true place seems to be a trifle below that of the real Mark Twain who created *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* and the first forty chapters of *Life on the Mississippi*. Let us see if we can disentangle his significant achievement from the mass of irrelevant commentary and adulation which has obscured it.

He was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, on September 11, 1862, studied privately and in the local school, read omnivorously, and sought to imitate what he read. Dickens, *The Arabian Nights*, Shakespeare, the Bible, Kipling, and Tennyson chiefly formed him. A strange assortment surely, with Kipling and *The Arabian Nights* most prominently coloring the foreground of his mind. Omar Khayyam to minister to his fatalism, Conan Doyle to stimulate his sense of action, Byron to give it a romantic coloring; add these, and you have a fair picture of his inclinations. He passes his youth as clerk in a drug store where the town gathers to gossip and swap stories, and then in 1882, at the age of twenty, he is transplanted to Texas where he lives the care-free life of the ranches at first, and later is employed in a bank, edits one local paper, and is reporter on another. Accused unjustly of embezzlement, he flees to Spanish-America, till learning of his wife's serious illness, he returns and surrenders himself to justice. Three years in prison (1898-1901) where he finds himself as a writer, two years more of struggle with editors, finally fame and quick financial rewards. Generous to a fault, charitable and heroically tolerant, a spendthrift

on others and making no claim for himself, he poured forth over four hundred stories in seven years, fighting bravely against ill-health and his own weakness, and died undaunted on June 5, 1910, entertaining his countrymen like Harlequin to the last. He ranks with Mark Twain to-day in the popular affection, and hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold in England alone. Wherein lies his success and wherein his failure? We are too near him to judge with authority, and moreover tolerance is the lesson he always taught. But I think time is already sifting his claim, revealing gold which has been hidden, and washing away much glittering quartz upon which he would have set little value.

When we come to analyze his qualities, what impresses us first is his zest. Few men seem to have accepted life more whole-heartedly and with less critical examination, and few men seem to have reported so favorably of what they found. O. Henry has the right to speak cheerfully, for he has suffered, and he tells us that he found life bracing and on the whole a glorious adventure. But because he has earned the right to say so, and quite apart from the truth or untruth of his state-

ment, we are not debarred from asking whether his gayety is not really prompted by the necessity the man has to conceal something. He has made the world his circus-tent, and he is master in the ring, but is he concealing another philosophy behind the clown's mask while he capers before his audience? I think we must admit that he is, and if we probe beneath the surface reverently, we shall find a fatalistic pessimism based on frustrations as profound as those of Mark Twain and Jack London. This man dares not tell us what he knows, but plies the wine-cup madly before the dance of death which comes full soon.

I picture him now as an ironic shade whose last disillusionment came after death, when the audience he amused accepted his caperings as their philosophy and founded memorial hotels and prizes to commemorate the false mask which hid the real O. Henry shrinking from their gaze. He lived in a world so mad that he could not acknowledge its reality, but christened it Bagdad-upon-the-Subway. Tunneling under this world was a hollow shrieking vault upon which American civilization rested, and the suffering men and women whom he knew he masked in tinsel also to

conceal their suffering. Bagdad-*upon*-the Subway! He did not emphasize any word of the phrase, and the public still laughs on at his stories innocent of their meaning, but these seeming sentimentalists do not always wear their hearts on their sleeves. Why does he quote Omar Khayyam so frequently, and more important still, why does he flash the point of his story so suddenly at us and as suddenly disappear? Because he has no hope that we shall listen, and because he is afraid of what we shall say.

And yet he has zest, infinite zest. It is because he sees two men in conflict in every one of us, the man who would spiritually succeed and the man who would materially succeed; and though he has little hope of the former winning, and indeed finds all the cards packed against his success, he knows that the spiritual defeat is never acknowledged, and that the strange little puppet, man, who is himself and you and I, will keep on fighting against the odds eternally.

If his voice as he tells you these stories must be confessed to be strident, it is because he would carry off his real feeling by an amused bravado, and this suggests to us that he is by no means sure of his effect. Am I reading too much significance

into these stories? I wonder. Listen to Al Jennings's account of their meeting in the Ohio penitentiary.

"The hospital attendant was standing at my door. I felt his glance, but I did not meet it. And then a voice, hushed and measured, that to me seemed like sunlight breaking through a cloud, sounded in my ear. The low rich tones rippled through the black prison curtain. . . . 'Colonel, we meet again.' . . . 'Colonel, we have the same tailor, but he does not provide us with the same cut of clothes,' the old droll, whimsical voice drawled without a chuckle. I looked into the face that would have scorned to show its emotion. It was still touched with grave, impressive hauteur, but the clear eyes, in that moment, seemed filmed and hurt." [1]

Was O. Henry the easy optimist he is represented to be? There is something more than mock feeling in a letter he wrote to Al Jennings, in which his humorous exaggeration of a mood is a form of self-protection familiar enough to readers of Mark Twain's correspondence. "I want to say that Pittsburgh is the 'low-durnedest' hole on the

[1] Al Jennings: *Through the Shadows with O. Henry,* 1921, pp. 104-5.

surface of the earth. The people here are the most ignorant, ill-bred, contemptible, boorish, degraded, insulting, sordid, vile, foul-mouthed, indecent, profane, drunken, dirty, mean, depraved curs that I ever imagined could exist. Columbus people are models of chivalry compared with them. I shall linger here no longer than necessary. . . . If I could get 30 days in the O. P. I believe I'd crack one of the statues that much to get a change of society from the hounds here. I'd rather sit in the dumphouse there and listen to the bucket lids rattle than to hear these varmints talk, as far as entertainment is concerned." [1]

This cynic with faith, this agnostic with all the theological virtues, fought with himself and laughed at himself as he did so. And always he wore a mask of indifference and rattle-brained triviality. Was the mask too successful? Has it concealed the message as well as the man? I am afraid that it has.

He could never take his art seriously enough, because he could not believe that an art was a complete life in itself, and so this incomparable *improvisatore* told his expanded anecdotes as if they were matters of a moment only, and con-

[1] Ibid. pp. 257-259.

cealed his wisdom by dressing it in ready-made clothing. His work is smothered with learned commentaries upon his technique, but he had no technique except this: "Be concise and familiar, and punch when your adversary is off guard. This stuns him, and you may then disappear." The formula has its merits if there is a spirit behind it, but it is a ghastly practical joke in the form it has assumed among his mechanical disciples whose numbers are legion. Bagdad has forgotten the subway underneath.

Will O. Henry take a place beside the greater American writers? The answer is: Yes, and no. Like Mark Twain, the vast body of his ephemeral productions will be forgotten, referred to occasionally by social historians perhaps, but well-nigh unintelligible to a future age with a different idiom. But the best of his stories, twenty-five or thirty in number, seem assured of permanence for their vitality and human understanding, their droll and yet sad romance, and their reticent truth half-masked by exaggeration.

CHAPTER XII

THE SCHOOL OF HENRY JAMES

The title of this chapter is intended to suggest a tendency rather than to define a rigid classification. While the influence of Henry James is direct enough upon Edith Wharton and Katharine Fullerton Gerould and Anne Douglas Sedgwick, in most cases it has been indirect and half unconscious, and has shown itself in different forms. Henry James's contribution to the present group is in some cases evident in a subtler psychological curiosity, in others in a preoccupation with special and limited social relations, elsewhere again in an echoing to tenuity of his technique. In every case, I think, it has resulted in an altogether unusual care for form, though not always unfortunately for precision.

Edith Wharton (1862 ——) is not only the pioneer, but so far the most representative disciple. The distinction of her stories is as evident as their Arctic frigidity. She has assimilated every lesson that her master can teach except

tenderness and ease, and in sheer craftsmanship it may even be held that she has occasionally surpassed him. But how often do we surprise the breath of life in her characters? How often does their frosty brilliance tingle with human exuberance? They move among the shades with reticence and decorum, and they have their moments of vicissitude sharply pointed and implicit with compact meaning, but Mrs. Wharton's scalpel slays them while it reveals them, and these puppets who live tremendous days seldom communicate their experience or set it against the sky.

Speaking of Mrs. Wharton among other American writers, Van Wyck Brooks has remarked: "That little seed of the spirit a wayward and unlucky wind has planted in them, why has it never been able to take on flesh and blood, why has it so dried up the springs of animal impulse? It is as if, driven in upon themselves, their lives were a constant strain, as if their emotional natures had run dry and they had come to exist solely in their intellects and their nerves, as if in fact they had gone gray and bloodless precisely in the measure that an inflexible conscience had enabled them in spite of all to trim the little lamp that flickered in them.

"Grow they certainly do not. With immense difficulty our intellectual types forge for themselves a point of view with which they confront the world, but like a suit of armor it permits no further expansion. They do not move easily within it; they are chafed and irritated by it; in order to breathe freely they are obliged to hold themselves rigidly to the posture they have at first adopted; and far from being able to develop spontaneously beyond this original posture they have to submit to its cramping limitations until the inevitable shrinkage of their mental tissues brings them release and relief." [1]

The point, I think you will admit, is overproven, but there is a great deal of truth in it. Mrs. Wharton's pictures are painted to be hung on the line, and her studies in manners frequently harden into studies in manner. We may recall that the Pelican in her story had the art "of transporting second-hand ideas into first-hand emotions," [2] a sufficiently common accomplishment which confronts us everywhere. Is it not a pardonable reaction to transpose first-hand emotions occasionally back again into second-hand

[1] *Letters and Leadership*, 1918, pp. 11-12.
[2] *The Greater Inclination*, 1899, p. 56.

ideas, particularly if it be done fastidiously and with consummate reticence?

When we allow for this, there is a great deal left to command. Mrs. Wharton has psychological as well as social standards, subtle insight into the causes behind appearances, faultless decorum, and a wide acquaintance with the masters of her art. She is fearless and incisive, concise and epigrammatic, with a fine sense of the theater as well as a discrimination which makes her chary of employing it. To sum up, her collected short stories form a superb *pastiche* of Henry James with little added. To appreciate adequately her own original power, we must turn to that masterly novel, *Ethan Frome*, with all its smoldering invitable tragedy.

Of Katharine Fullerton Gerould (1879 ——), the distinction is equally obvious. While the greater number of American writers, who have been influenced by Henry James would seem to have been indirectly derivative through Edith Wharton, Mrs. Gerould has gone to the fountainhead. But unlike Mrs. Wharton she has chosen to see life through her own eyes, and if life has chiefly presented itself to her in a long series of rather special cases, we have no right to quarrel ex-

cept with the result. When we come to the result, we must admit its particular interest, even when we are sometimes tempted to deny its importance. I cannot bring myself always to a mood of complete credence in her characters, as individual human beings, but I feel that she believes in them, at any rate as forces, and as forces they are real enough and as ironical as life itself.

She is incessantly testing weak places in life, tapping where she suspects that the crust is thin, and reporting the hollow reverberation when she finds it. She tests every link of her own narrative, indefatigably patient in her craftsmanship, and her final achievement is triumphantly successful, except that she cannot conceal her labor. The brilliance is too incontestable. I think that is why she has been most successful in stories with a shadowy motive and a shadowy background, in which she tests hollow places quietly and cautiously and leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions. No writer has written better stories of spiritual ghosts, if we except the author of *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Great Good Place*. In fact, I find her art at its best a little ghostly. The air is over rarified, the discriminations all too fine, especially in her earlier work. Her critical acumen,

however, is joined to the spirit of a good fighter, and I can imagine no better or more valuable leader of that Tory opposition in criticism which is necessary to keep the ship of our literary state flying gaily before the wind.

Maxwell Struthers Burt (1882 ——) has the manner of Henry James, but not the matter. With something of the same constructive ability and an arresting strategic skill, he has chosen to take situations of undoubted theatric effectiveness, and to utilize this effectiveness to the full. His interest is in the psychology of difficult situations, but he lacks reticence and humor. Historically he is important because he has experimented more or less successfully in uniting the action of Bret Harte to the spiritual questioning of the New England analysts.

The social satire of Arthur Johnson (1881 ——) is effective because of its ease and subtlety. As profoundly influenced by Henry James as any of his contemporaries, he carries his competence lightly and can even afford to parody his own method. He is shrewd where other disciples are merely sharp, and his humor is more kindly. He has a fine talent which is not sufficiently exercised.

Few American story-tellers have been more ascetic in the practice of their art than Willa Sibert Cather (1875 ——). Fifteen years intervened between the publication of her first collection of tales, *The Troll-Garden* (1905), and her second, *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920), the better half of which is drawn from the former book. I can remember reading *The Troll-Garden* as a boy and being strangely stirred by its expression of what I had dumbly felt, and been unable to voice, in my own background. It was romance to me then, but it seems very real now, and representative of what youths all around us are struggling to realize, not only for themselves but for the world in which they live.

There is flaming revolt in these pages if you will, yet a revolt which is eager to create rather than to destroy. It sees the sordidness and materialism of a mechanized and standardized civilization, and it also sees the eager fresh generous spirit of the pioneer. It does not evade the conflict, nor is it bitter, because it sees both aspects at once rooted in its own breast. Rather would it drive its two horses, the black horse and the white, through Heaven and Hell and the land of Whip-

perginny,[1] if it may somehow win home again with experience and freedom, or failing that, fall gloriously like Phaëthon in the rashness of its youth.

And so Miss Cather has been at pains to reveal the hopes and aspirations of the young before they are clouded and defeated, and to set youth itself, virgin youth erect in the sunlight (is it sunset? is it sunrise?) of a virgin land.

> "Quoth Hugh, I shall be whipped for this,
> Or else be dubbed a knight."

These studies of failure point the way to success, and the pioneer artists who pass across her pages have fallen in the fight to win life for America out of the dead facts all about them. As Miss Cather's earlier stories have the more finely realized substance, so have they also a less disciplined technique. In the later stories with their consummate technical handling, I find the reality a little clouded, perhaps because the vision is a little tired.

The distinguished art of Vincent O'Sullivan (1872 ——) is difficult to classify and is strangely

[1] Acknowledgments to Robert Graves and the ghost of Thomas Nash.

ignored. It might even be plausibly argued that he belongs rather to the history of the English short story. An exile for the greater part of his life in Europe, and an exile to-day in France, he has had no influence upon other writers, and for the most part no preoccupation with American life. But his historical background is as American as that of Henry James, and of recent years he has profited by the interval of his return to America to write social satires, which are a little bitter in their gentleness, and certain fantasies which have been born in our Northern air.

Of his early books of short stories, published in England a generation ago, the most that may be said is that they proved him to be a representative, though minor, story-teller of his time. Beardsley, Symons, and Wilde were his associates, Pater and the French symbolists his masters. A fastidious style, an avidity for strange experience, a premature disillusionment: these are the notes characteristic of his studies, and they have not sufficed to preserve them from the past.

A long interval of silence, two distinguished novels, and a few stories of ripe fulfillment complete the tale of his prose writings, yet in these last few narratives I believe that O'Sullivan has

won a definite position from which it will be hard to dislodge him. Humor, irony, precision, reticence, subtlety: all these are to be found in the short stories as well as in *The Good Girl*, together with a total concealment of an art as subtle in its implications and as smooth in its surfaces as any writer of fiction can show. Another fine artist whom America has abandoned to Europe!

In the art of Anne Douglas Sedgwick (1873 ——), the reticence of New England has been transplanted to English soil, and has rooted there. I find sentimentality in *Christmas Roses* (1920) [1] and a little sickliness. These mothers sacrificing their sons so willingly and silently for England do not appeal somehow to youth to-day. They are a little too gracious and sure of spiritual victory. Their silence somehow seems an attitude, a little too Roman to be human or admirable. The portrait should be painted, but it calls for irony rather than self-satisfaction; as Mrs. de Sélincourt has painted it, it seems to me to imply spiritual snobbery.

With this *caveat*, I cannot sufficiently admire her delicate symbolism, subtle rendering of atmosphere, and quiet realism. In her earlier stories

[1] Published in England as *Autumn Crocuses*.

written before the numbing effects of the war, there is greater psychological depth and a more healthy ironic portraiture, though we still feel something of Boston's literary anæmia in them. The admirable method of Henry James is not precisely adapted to Mrs. de Sélincourt's special quality of vision. We should prefer to have the finer grain of her characters less obtrusively pointed out. There is more than a touch of enamel in her surfaces. Were we to include her better novels in our survey, we should be compelled to modify this judgment considerably. Regarding her short stories alone, we shall find our chief enjoyment in the study of her method rather than in her interpretation of life.

Fleta Campbell Springer (1886——) and Laura Spencer Portor also remind us more of the manner than of the matter of Henry James. The former has an eye for drama and scene, and heightens all her effects to produce an effective climax. She reminds us of Maxwell Struthers Burt, and we are conscious of a like sense of strain, but she is a born story-teller and technically of unusual competence. Laura Spencer Portor is perhaps equally effective, but subdues her substance to more quiet backgrounds. She is gentle

where Fleta Campbell Springer is restless, while less sure of her medium. I find sentimentality in both writers.

Harrison Rhodes (1871 ——) has more of Henry James's authentic cosmopolitanism. He has sentiment rather than sentimentality, sense rather than sensibility. Content to suggest a background by a few strokes, his interest is chiefly in unforced relationships, or in the humor to be derived from relationships which have been a trifle forced upon his characters by life's kindly ironies. His better work has been most inadequately recognized.

Edward Carrington Venable (1884 ——) has successfully gratified a passion for what is difficult in several subtle studies in psychological conflict. He has accepted, perhaps a little too patiently, the conventions of the "well-made" story, but only to clear the field for an absorbing game of chess with characters whose reality is in what they feel and say rather than in what they do. It is difficult to foresee his ultimate achievement, but few men are more worth watching attentively.

In the work of Georgia Wood Pangborn (1872 ——), we shall find most interest in observing how the author evokes her atmospheric effects

in the psychological ghost story. Mrs. Pangborn is preoccupied with her pattern, and she is alertly curious to discover what her dreams may make of it. A patient art, which expresses a slightly sentimental attitude, achieves on the whole what it has set out to do.

We have still to consider for a moment the work of two very different writers. Henry Blake Fuller (1857 ——) does not in strict logic belong to this chapter of our history. He is hardly a disciple of Henry James, and his allegiance is to an older generation. But somehow youth now tends to claim him as one of its own generation, and the subtle veracity of his psychological renderings suggests a kinship with Miss Cather and other writers whom we have been considering. In his short stories as well as in his novels, we find a union of keen insight and utter detachment, of realism and romance, and of concise and austere form with warm human sympathy. If O. Henry is the final portrayer of New York artlessly, Henry Blake Fuller is the final portrayer of Chicago in formal art.

Logan Pearsall Smith may conclude this stage of our chronicle. Like Henry Blake Fuller, he is an artist of an older generation whom youth is

now discovering. But his single volume of short stories, *The Youth of Parnassus* (1895), is a sealed book to most American readers, and I call attention to it here in the hope that some wise publisher may see fit to reprint it. The sense of youth and its passing beauty has seldom been so delicately rendered by an American artist, and the quality of style in these well-nigh faultless stories is rare indeed. Let us set his books on the same shelf with those of Max Beerbohm and Barbey d'Aurevilly.

CHAPTER XIII

CONTEMPORARY REGIONALISTS

If we examine attentively the large body of stories by contemporary writers who depend upon local color to differentiate their work from that of others, we shall find that almost no important personal contribution has been made, and that for the most part these men have been content to follow decorously in the footsteps of Bret Harte and Hamlin Garland, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Thomas Nelson Page. They have come too late to stake out an individual domain, and they are compelled to depend upon meticulous observation of surfaces and an appeal to standardized emotions in order to arouse a responsive attitude upon the part of the reader.

William Allen White (1868——), for example, sees the Middle West through the eyes of an optimistic Hamlin Garland, and in a less closely woven fabric seeks to cloak the scene of his stories with a philosophy of politics and economic relationships. He does achieve studies of childhood which

are recognizably vivid, but usually he gives us a message and a background, with somewhat inadequately realized lay figures to meditate between the two.

Frances Gilchrist Wood reminds us more closely of Hamlin Garland, though her passionate pioneer spirit is sometimes expressed more rhetorically. She has a sense of history, makes drama out of spiritual struggle, and is representative of her people. Her craftsmanship is a little too competent and studied, her championship a little overemphasized, yet a real talent is manifest in her stories, and they are a definite contribution to the growing literature of Middle Western regionalism.

Two dialect writers of the period are in sufficiently marked contrast. Lucy Pratt (1874 ——) sets down Negro chronicles with a pawky humor and deft perception of a difficult speech, and Anzia Yezierska (1886 ——) voices the smoldering idealism of the Jewish immigrant in a vibrant and nervous idiom which tends to rhetoric and false sentiment. Miss Yezierska has real power which needs greater restraint to make a more effective impression. Lucy Pratt, who is less pretentious, has the surer touch.

Benjamin Rosenblatt (1880 ——), whose promise was as great as his achievement is so far disappointing, has written several stories which show an ironic perception of tragicomedy with more than one authentic touch of Chekhov. He is less sure than Anzia Yezierska of the exclusive value of Anglo-Saxon American culture, and equally sentimental as a racial figure.

Harry B. Smith (1880-1918) was only incidentally a short story writer, but his *Cape Breton Tales* suggest that had he lived, the Acadian might have found a chronicler with something of Mrs. Gaskell's wistful grace. He cared for the beauty of simple words, and there is an easy artlessness about his style which is content to suggest where most of his contemporaries relentlessly state.

Few local color sketches have been more carefully studied than those of Francis Buzzell (1882 ——). He has dreamed his way into the secret life of a Middle Western village, and composed a small group of finished mosaics in which each word is deliberately inlaid with a thoughtful sense of pattern and tone. Were the body of work larger, and the relationships of a greater number of people in the village analyzed, his achievement might prove to be as substantial in its bitter fidelity

as that of Edgar Lee Masters in *The Spoon River Anthology*.

Armistead C. Gordon (1855——) has portrayed with equal care certain aspects of negro plantation life. A friend and associate of Thomas Nelson Page, he has rivaled, if not surpassed, *Marse Chan* in blending the humor and poetry and philosophy of the negro. He has given his stories a richly toned background, and the dialect which he reproduces has been studied with scientific care.

Pennsylvania German life as it centers round Gettysburg is the chief subject of Elsie Singmaster (1879——). Her historic sense of passion gone down to defeat and of mourning victory throbs in the pages of *Gettysburg*, dulled to an ache at times, at other times exultant and challenging the indifference of the day. Her form is not impeccable, and her other stories of Pennsylvania are too loosely woven, but *Gettysburg* probably ranks not far below *Main-Travelled Roads* and *A New England Nun*.

I find talent of equal distinction in the Nantucket stories of Edwina Stanton Babcock. Their humor borders on caricature and owes something, I should say, to Dickens. They have all the

qualities of local color pursued for its own sake and few of the defects. Miss Babcock has found the color of New England speech and heightened it, but she has seldom made a poetic convention of it, as so many others have done, and its vital exuberance has character and directness.

Dorothy Canfield (1879 ——), who chronicles the village life of Vermont, is not innocent of sensibility, and occasionally we feel that her story is strung too tightly. As a general rule, however, she is quiet and faithful enough, maintaining a uniform level of honest craftsmanship not so far below that of Alice Brown. I sometimes find her message a trifle too explicit. I seldom find the story she has to tell less than moving, and more than once her attainment is very high indeed.

Lincoln Colcord (1883 ——) is a less even artist, but I think more significant upon the whole. With the memory of many generations of New England seafaring in his blood, and the consciousness of being a representative spokesman of the clipper-ship tradition, he has told many tales of the sea, full of character and with an unspoken sailor's philosophy. Stark and laconic as they are, deeds speak for themselves in these stories, and they form a welcome contrast to the sentimental sea-tales of

landsmen who seek for romantic escape. Their value is immediate and practical and hard, their message a plea for facing reality courageously. Intolerant at times, I suppose, and inclined to impose the author's will upon us for our benefit, they are characteristically of Puritan New England, but there is a harsher truth in them than in the sterile chronicles of anæmia and of transcendentalism gone to seed which have buried the voices of Jonathan Edwards and his predecessors.

Four Middle Western chroniclers of monotony and frustration seem to call for a word at least in passing. Alice Cowdery, Walter Muilenberg, Walter Myers (1886——), and Agnes Mary Brownell (?-1921) have very much the same point of view. They brood intensely on their prisoning environment, and voice the dull revolt of half-awakened youth against the despotism of unimaginative conformity, respect for the letter rather than the spirit of the law, and materialistic self-sufficiency. Muilenberg and Myers see possibilities of escape, the others are sadly acquiescent. At least three of these writers have found their first encouragement in a remarkable little periodical, *The Midland,* which for seven or eight years has served in its obscurity to crystallize all

that is seeking a voice in the imaginative life of the Middle West. While it cannot be said that it has discovered any exceptionally forceful artist, its editor and publisher, John Towner Frederick, has performed an admirable function in tilling the soil out of which art is most likely to spring.

Were we to consider Theodore Dreiser (1871 ——) as a novelist, he would be entitled to a separate chapter in this chronicle. As a short story writer, he is less significant. The memorable poignancy of *The Lost Phoebe* ensures it a place beside the best American legends, and it is likely to become a memory among the people until it is absorbed into their folk-lore. Otherwise Dreiser's stories impress me as studies for larger paintings, rugged in their naturalism and craggy in their style. They have power, insight, and sweep, and they are very badly written. Read them as if they were inferior translations of a good French realist of the second order, and you may perhaps judge them fairly.

Mary Brecht Pulver (1883 ——) is quite as uneven and much less rugged. Her stories are diffuse until they have caught their stride, and then they reveal considerable dramatic power. She has not entirely avoided sentimentality, and

she has written too rapidly. A selection of her stories might, however, be gathered easily which would focus her talent, and such a selection would make it sufficiently clear that she is a story-teller to be reckoned with by her contemporaries.

Our regional travels have now brought us to Joseph Hergesheimer (1880——), the only American writer considered in this chapter who has frequently succeeded in completely subduing his use of local color to its proper place as an unobtrusive background to his drama. Like Theodore Dreiser, he plays a more important part as a novelist than as a short story-teller, but unlike Dreiser, the novel has developed in him a sense of form which is evident in the faultless general structure of his best tales.

His short stories fall into two groups. In the former, he has essayed the *nouvelle* successfully, and achieved an admirably woven texture in which what he has seen and felt is set down impartially as a picture of life with no unnecessary comment. His method is leisurely and closely akin to that of John Galsworthy, though he is less of a propagandist. In the second group, he has written many less satisfactory stories which suffer from diffuseness and an occasional insistence upon triviality.

Here the form of the *nouvelle* is abandoned, though not its length, and the author's saturation in his background is excessive.

At his best, Hergesheimer's art is more dispassionate than that of any contemporary American story-teller except Sherwood Anderson. He is less representative of the nation than Anderson, and indeed the virtues of his art would probably have flourished more readily had he been able to draw instinctively on the traditional background of Europe. Nevertheless, he would seem to have found a definite orientation in America, and he is likely to survive as the most memorable literary figure among all those whom we have just discussed.

CHAPTER XIV

MAIN STREET

I HAVE grouped together in this chapter a number of writers who have a wide national suffrage with the reading public, and who endeavor to express the daily life of America without much attention to literary style, but with considerable vitality and faithfulness. In the history of the period they are likely to occupy much the same place as Bulwer-Lytton and Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins among the Victorian novelists. Ring W. Lardner, however, may prove to have realized the life of his time more fully.

Irvin Shrewsbury Cobb (1876 ——) is probably the most representative of these writers at the moment. He has inherited most of Mark Twain's qualities, though not always in the same degree, and he is free from most of Mark Twain's inhibitions. A humor based alternately on exaggeration and on what he might call gross understatement plays freely upon life in his stories, never unmindful of the fact that true comedy is a little sad.

While his social satire is quick, it is not always keen, and I think he is at his best where he improvises a story of tragicomedy, giving full rein to his fancy and permitting his characters to tell him what they are to do. While he has written more than one fine story of pure tragedy, these are really his *tours de force*. He is in his true element sitting in the village grocery store and swapping anecdotes with unobtrusive philosophy. Told with an effective drawl, his stories amble on in pedestrian fashion, missing no significant detail and absorbing much detail that is insignificant.

Few stories of the time have such a sense of being told rather than written, and to admit this is to imply that Cobb has a definite personal style. He can personify inanimate objects until they are the chorus of his play, and at times he very nearly equals Dickens in the sheer human gusto of his sense impressions. He resembles Dickens as well in his gift of credible caricature and in his leisureliness and scorn of formality. At times he writes very badly, often in his best stories. At other times he is precise, and more sure of his medium than Mark Twain himself. On the whole, he is probably as significant as O. Henry and as likely to outlast our day by virtue of his better work.

Fannie Hurst (1889 ——) is more difficult to estimate. Her style suffers from every conceivable vice,—diffuseness, shrillness, sentimentality, and rhetoric,—and yet many of her stories are difficult to forget. Every story she has written is three times too long for its most effective presentation, every character she has portrayed is overdrawn and hectic, and many of her situations appeal to false emotion. Yet there is a vividness and color in her dialogue which is unique, a sense of dramatic values which can afford to waste emotion, and a personal passion for what she sees which frequently conquers every prejudice. If she wrote more quietly and slowly and would play the part of devil's advocate to herself, she might surpass all but one or two living story-writers.

Edna Ferber (1887 ——), while equally popular, is less successful as an artist. Like Fannie Hurst, she is a social propagandist and content to accept material wherever she finds it without much questioning. Her irony is perhaps more searching, her descriptive power more direct. On the other hand her dialogue has less immediate actuality and her characterization is not often so sharp and clear-cut. Her one altogether memorable story is *The Gay Old Dog.*

Ring W. Lardner (1885 ——), has no artistic pretensions whatever, and would disclaim any personal importance as an artist, I feel sure. And yet he has grasped more of the sense and drift of American life than any story-teller of his time except Sherwood Anderson and Waldo Frank. His style is entirely bald and unemotional, but it conceals a fine philosophy, and his unpretentious narratives in slang are worth dozens of more pretentious stories.

James Brendan Connolly (1868 ——) is likewise without pretention. He is an excellent entertainer with considerable philosophy, and he writes accurately out of personal knowledge. In his somewhat limited range, he is exceedingly vivid, and the life of the fishermen who sail out of Gloucester to the banks is faithfully rendered. I find him sentimental occasionally and his dialect is somewhat mannered. He provides the reader with a romantic escape from life at small expense. Set his stories beside those of Norman Duncan, and they suffer as literature. I suspect, however, that they are more faithful to the life which they describe.

Booth Tarkington (1869 ——), who has been extravagantly praised as a novelist, has written

many more or less noteworthy studies of American childhood, and adolescence. They do not belong to our literature, but they have considerable value in our social history. They are by no means innocent of artistic compromise, and yet I think they succeed in their modest end. Certainly, American surfaces are cleverly rendered, and the outer environment of Middle Western life is faithfully portrayed.

Rupert Hughes (1872 ——), whose novels are entirely negligible in literature, has an inner room somewhere in which he practices fine craftsmanship occasionally. His studies of Irish home life in New York City are exceptionally well-done, and are true to the inner as well as the outer Irish self. Elsewhere he has written several stories of frustration which are sound enough in their unpretentious homely realism.

Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews has written one memorable story, *The Perfect Tribute*, which is one of the very few successful Lincoln legends, and many other stories of most unequal merit. Her propaganda frequently defeats her artistic purpose, and I find in her stories of patriotism an effective dramatic sense and unusual powers of technical construction.

Melville Davisson Post (1871 ——), and Frederick Stuart Greene (1870 ——), are chosen for mention here because they illustrate perfectly the exceptional technical skill which the mechanical short story has developed in America. Neither Post nor Greene has any relation to literature, and yet their sheer mechanical ability to construct probably surpasses that of any of the great masters. It is perhaps significant that one is a lawyer and the other an engineer. Their use of suspense and calculated suggestion has made them write effective mystery stories whose framework Poe would have envied and whose substance he would have scorned.

Finally, Ben Ames Williams (1889 ——), calls for a word of commendation. He seems likely to rival O. Henry in chronicling the tragicomedy of American city life. While he has not yet gained entire mastery of his medium, we feel a quality of humanism in his better stories which is unusual.

The writers whom I have chosen to mention in this chapter are perhaps the most representative of what is a large and not altogether healthy school. For the most part, they are content to deal with surfaces and with obvious emotions

which are unduly heightened for emphasis. On the other hand, they rightfully revolt against the sterile anæmia of much pretentious American fine writing. Their characteristic diffuseness has been encouraged and developed by many great commercial periodicals, and their repudiation of all psychological subtlety is due to the same influence. The best of these men and women are marking time. Freedom, when it comes, is likely to appear from another quarter.

CHAPTER XV

ROMANTIC ESCAPE

When *A White Horse Winter* was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1912, it was at once realized by discriminating readers that a new talent of great promise had appeared in American short story literature. In the eleven years which have followed the publication of this story, Wilbur Daniel Steele (1886——) has pursued a course of uncompromising fidelity to his literary ideals, publishing comparatively few stories, but maintaining a standard of imaginative reality which has slowly, but surely, deepened in an art which bears all the signs of permanence.

If I were asked to indicate the single quality by which Mr. Steele's stories rightly claim their place in American literature, I should say that it was by virtue of his sensitive fidelity to the more abiding romance of ordinary life. While it is true that his pictorial sense of atmospheric values serves to define the terms on which he is willing to render human character in conflict, the essential merit of

his findings is due to the impartial view which he takes of circumstance, an impartiality as unconscious and as real as that of a child before daily happenings. It is, perhaps, this very joy in apprehending spiritual values without self-consciousness, as a child apprehends them, which has often led him to set down what he has seen in the words of a boy, to whom wonder reveals more of the truth than self-analysis, and to whom delight in a story is a sufficient preoccupation, without premature analysis of his own human relation to what he sees.

Mr. Steele's pictorial sense is somewhat akin to that of Fromentin in *Dominique*, though less hard by virtue of his sense of wonder. His stories have, in fact, a quality of honest romantic escape rare in American life, and so correspondingly rare in American literature. Landscape, with its human foreground, gives Mr. Steele a sense of liberation, so that it is a refuge for him from the impact of facts, so falsely called reality by most men. He is, therefore, a romantic realist, who refuses to escape from life, but contents himself by making a truce with it. If his stories reveal a certain nostalgia, it is a personal nostalgia, and it does not color his interpretation of life. You feel

that his quarrel is with the matter-of-fact rather than with civilization.

In this respect he is to be contrasted with Synge, though there is much resemblance in other ways between the two writers. To Synge the Aran Islands were a refuge from civilization, and his art was almost a protective coloration against life. In our crowded mercantile civilization, Mr. Steele must have been tempted frequently to a similar reaction, and, like Synge, he, too, might have found what he sought in a more primitive and brutal life, with its franker valuation of motive and relationship. But instead of seeking for an American Aran, he has found the relief of self-expression in a curious and searching simplification of life, which he has set against a more familiar background.

Behind the complications which his men and women weave for one another frequently looms the eternal but ever-changing pattern of the sea. The passionate heart of the waters pulses in many of his tales, never forgotten yet never fully realized, an inscrutable mystery with all the blind and irresistible power of destiny molding lives to an unseen end.

It is as if men and women were unmindful of

all life not directed to the sea's ends, and as if they fulfilled these ends inevitably, and often against their dearest desires. Here is their romantic escape and at the same time their greatest spiritual fulfillment.

Mr. Steele's apprehension of human life in its relation to natural forces is from a different angle than that of Joseph Conrad. The latter sets man against an eternal background remote from common experience, and reveals him translated from his fellows by the simplification of space and time experienced by those who follow the sea. Mr. Steele's preoccupation is with a more generally shared background, in which wonder is born of ordinary things, whose strangeness has been forgotten through constant surface familiarity. He finds as much drama in the dory life of Portuguese fishermen on Cape Cod as Conrad has found in the southern seas, and as much detachment from circumstance, save in so far as it is transformed by insight into a new world of strange, forgotten things.

His men and women part for a day only to find the world changed upon their return. But the drama of a day arises naturally out of a long past of slowly accumulating experience, and this back-

ground of a suddenly recalled past is most often the moving force of his situation.

Few writers show such economy in the use of their material. You feel that all of Mr. Steele's stories develop from a single picture intensely realized by the artist, and that it is his spirit of inquiry brooding over the implications of this picture which has eventually constituted his story. He is a master of color, and in a few careful strokes presents the same natural background for the passion of his characters that many novelists require several chapters to reveal.

Most of his stories are really fifth acts, in which the drama's previous development is revealed by suggestion. It is the crisis in every human relation which interests him most, but his implicit realization of what has gone before inevitably suggests that his finer success in fiction will be won as a novelist.

While his first novel, *Storm*, had all the fine qualities of his short stories, its episodic character suggested that it was a prelude to short story writing rather than the deliberately wrought craftsmanship of a novelist. In the past few years Mr. Steele's technique has tended more and more toward that of a novelist, particularly in his stories

of Urkey Island, in which his canvas is larger and more detailed in its realization of a New England community.

H. G. Dwight (1875 ——) has published two collections of short stories in which atmosphere is realized completely as a motive power urging the actions of his characters toward their inevitable fulfillment. He has a gift for the romantic presentation of adventure in exotic backgrounds, and an absolute disregard for the mechanical conventions of the industrial short story. So personal a style is seldom as subdued, and I suspect that because of it Dwight will dine late with Landor. His leisure and quiet brooding over pattern is utterly alien to the course of American life, and as we read *Stamboul Nights* and *The Emperor of Elam*, we feel that we are waiting for a very sensitive plate to develop the image which it has precisely recorded on a pale still evening. Sensitive as these stories are, no dramatic touch escapes them on the one hand or receives undue emphasis on the other, while the shadowy background serves to minimize their temporal significance.

Dwight's passion, which is flaming enough, is an intellectual passion, but he conceals it behind an ironic and aristocratic mask of outward imper-

turbability. I find him antinomian only so far as Blake and Dostoevsky and Nietzsche may be regarded as antinomian, while his romantic setting heightens a sad realism such as we have seen that O. Henry found and reflected subtly enough in his tales of Bagdad-upon-the-Subway. The influence of Conrad is felt in Dwight's philosophy as well as in his atmosphere, but he is a sterner man and has little self-pity. While the sense of romantic escape is pervasive, he knows the way home again, and his nostalgia for the ideal is controlled by the human acceptance of life as he has found it. To him life is indeed a tangled skein whose unity he cannot unravel, but his personal length of thread as a part of it he can and will set straight and clear before him. And so he smiles a little sadly and applies himself to his task patiently and without too much hope as to the outcome.

He is a pure and disinterested artist who happens to be an American, but it is as a citizen of a different and greater country that he sets down these tales. Perhaps we are too near to judge of his achievement, and certainly we have shown little enough interest. I hazard in all diffidence the prophecy, nevertheless, that in the eyes of a future generation he will seem as important as Joseph

Conrad, although the sum of his published work is small and the public response to it in America has been scarcely perceptible.

James Branch Cabell (1879 ——) is more interesting as a philosopher than as a writer of stories. It is as easy as it is unfair to both men to compare his tales to Maurice Hewlett's romantic narratives of love and adventure. Both Hewlett and Cabell have elaborated a patterned and tapestried prose whose artificiality they have taken no pains to conceal. I must confess that I find myself as unable to admire this prose for its own sake as I find myself able to respond with considerable interest to Cabell's interpretation of life.

His tales are studies in manner and setting, often to their cost, but they are also brilliant analyses of life's irony. Cabell is a jongleur in a court of business, and his philosophy of disillusionment is strictly modern. He believes life to be a happy or unhappy accident, if it is not really a dream of Cockaigne in which soul and body are in uncertain conflict to provide mirth for the gods. He would have man cheat the gods if he can with their own tricks, and his ideal would seem to be a Don Quixote with no faith and little hope and great charity giving up everything for

his one desire, and winning the fruit of that desire in defeat. Miguel de Unamuno has recently voiced a more positive philosophy of Don Quixote, the Spanish Christ with all the theological virtues, in *The Tragic Sense of Life*. Be this as it may, we have all our ideal of the happy warrior in conflict, and Cabell, who has no doubt not read Unamuno, arrives at much the same conclusion from the negative side.

Life is a conflict of antinomies with equal value, and we are to achieve if we can the marriage of Heaven and Hell. The dualism is by no means Manichean, because it tends toward a unity, and Cabell would have us seek that unity by making life a classic art. His happy warrior is the artist in love or the artist in honor or the artist in literature, and whichever he is, he is an artist at the expense of all else, and the conflict between the opposing forces is always within the man.

The outer surface of Cabell's stories is unduly enameled. Wear a mask by all means, but see that it fits and that life may breathe under it. In *Jurgen* Cabell succeeded superbly in his aims. In his four volumes of collected tales, he seems to me to have failed, though often finely.

James Hopper (1876 ——) and Calvin Johns-

ton have both chosen often to tell their stories from the point of view of childhood. At their best they succeed in carrying the method of indirect suggestion very far, and gain thereby a detached and disinterested viewpoint without the slightest sacrifice of human sympathy. Both men are superior journalists, and have the journalistic fault at times of sacrificing balance to theatrical effectiveness.

Charles Caldwell Dobie (1881 ——), who is technically a virtuoso, suffers so far from a lack of sufficient background. While his substance is visualized clearly, it is sometimes deficient in physical grasp. He has not yet found a personal style, but a future curve of great promise may be plotted from his achievement up to the present. He sees life in much the same terms as Wilbur Daniel Steele, whom he also resembles in certain technical respects. I feel that he has a sense of failure because he has not successfully conformed to the mechanical plot formulæ which are the idols of the present market-place, while as a matter of fact these formulæ are a danger to him. Dobie's stories have been written in a land without shadows, a land which hates neutral tints, and the symptoms of his revolt against sharp contrasts are the most hopeful indication for his future work.

Unlike Steele, he would appear to lack the structural sense of the novelist. In the short story he has often very nearly achieved the same level as Steele at his best.

Mary Heaton Vorse and Susan Glaspell (1882 ——), who have influenced Steele and been influenced by him in turn, owe something to Henry James, while viewing life in a less detached and restricted social field of vision. Both have found subjects in the Portuguese fishermen's life on Cape Cod, and both have gone elsewhere for most of their material. The former has sometimes permitted propaganda partially to usurp the place of art, the latter has written stories in which the theater obtrudes. In general, however, it may be said that both are conscientious artists whose better stories have considerable body and subtlety as well as distinguished literary craftsmanship.

Gordon Arthur Smith (1886 ——) and Richard Matthews Hallet (1887 ——) are much more frankly romantic. Smith has a gift of fantasy, which owes something to Leonard Merrick and rather more to Stevenson. He approaches perilously close to sentimentality, but avoids it by a hair's breadth. He has gusto, humor, and color, and he dwells on surfaces. Hallet, on the other

hand, is inclined to avoid obvious sentiment, while sometimes skirting perilously close to melodrama. While the short story form imposes restrictions upon him to which he has so far adapted himself, it would seem that he is likely to realize himself most completely as a novelist. He has an eye for concreteness, though not at the expense of romance, and a passion for what is difficult that is not yet completely under artistic control. His sense of humor, however, usually saves his stories from strain, while his social sense has outgrown the limitations of propaganda.

This cannot be said of Mary Synon (1881 ——), whose purpose outruns her art. There is a quality of insistence about her stories which distorts their human values, and it is only because she is a born story-teller that her overtaut emotional fabric is not ripped apart. She has mastered some of the devices of Henry James and turned them into tricks. If she could learn the emphasis of understatement and think less of immediate effect, her abundant gifts would be less obscured by their rhetorical presentation.

Stephen French Whitman, who is primarily a novelist, has written a number of fantastic stories in which the desires of the mind are subdued to the

show of things. His manner is as sumptuous as his irony is keen, and the pageantry of his Arabian Night's vision masks an attitude toward life not unlike that of Cabell, whom he has once or twice surpassed.

Thomas Beer (1889 ——) and Burton Kline (1877 ——) seem to me to be escaping from themselves. I should say that Beer knows his Stendhal and Kline his Meredith, and that they have both discovered Freud with relief. Beer has the greater detachment, Kline the greater exuberance, and both have an insufficient sense of humor. They do not revolt successfully from the industrial scene, because each has divided desires. They would be excellent and valuable satirists if they were more disinterested artists. When will it be possible for America to use such fine creative restlessness to better ends?

Barry Benefield, whose reserve is extreme, is difficult to assess because his work is inaccessible. Such stories of his as have appeared in periodicals during the past few years have moved me strangely. He might be one of the most valuable critics of American life we have if he could be brought to believe more fully in the value of his work.

Harvey O'Higgins (1876 ——) has not sought romantic escape himself, but he has analyzed with scientific accuracy many cases of it in American life. His imaginary biographies of eminent Americans are keen and tender in their insight, and I esteem them highly as a brilliant diagnosis of our spiritual symptoms. They are set down in meticulous detail by a fine reporter who has learned something from Defoe and all the rest from life.

Achmed Abdullah (1881 ——) provides two sorts of romantic escape. The ephemeral outlet is through gratifying the public thirst for sensation at any cost. The finer outlet is in satisfying his own nostalgia for Asia and interpreting with much of Kipling's vivid sense of color and odor that noble Eastern life of elemental things to which Kipling has given false values which Abdullah silently corrects.

John Russell (1885 ——) sentimentalizes that reality and only redeems himself because he is a fine raconteur. Charles J. Finger (1871 ——), on the other hand, tells us traveler's tales of equal wonder, but invests them with dignity as a spiritual adventure.

Finally, Jeanette Marks (1875 ——) recurs to the old New England form of romantic escape

through transcendentalism, and in *The Sun-Chaser* and *Old Lady Hudson* we have the Indian summer of Hawthorne lingering on with a touch of frost in fragile delicacy.

Here romantic escape passes perihelion, and the course of the short story returns to temporal things in order to regard them more searchingly. Edna Bryner and Frederick Booth and others point the way to Sherwood Anderson, while Konrad Bercovici with his elemental tales of gypsy life leads romantics home by releasing their inhibitions and facing reality in what is a strange environment to his public.

CHAPTER XVI

SHERWOOD ANDERSON AND WALDO FRANK

An English critic has recently pointed out that whenever the craft of story-telling has attained high mechanical efficiency, there has been a necessary reaction. After Maupassant came Chekhov, for example, and so in England after Kipling comes Katherine Mansfield, and in America after "O. Henry" comes Sherwood Anderson.

This revolt against mechanical technique, so far as Anderson is concerned, is only the sign of a much more profound revolt in him which has attained both gentleness and outward serenity. It is the revolt against a dull conformity which custom has staled, a conformity based upon the principle of leveling down rather than leveling up, a conformity of negation rather than of healthy growth. Anderson meets it with a quiet convincing smile and a firm, but gentle "Non Possumus."

He challenges the general assumed validity of that New England puritanism, which is moribund

in New England, but which traveled to the Middle West with the settlers from the Atlantic seaboard, and became so firmly rooted in the soil that it only grew more sturdily in the industrialized and mechanized civilization which followed pioneer life in this part of America. Anderson's criticism is valid for the whole of the United States, but it is specially illustrated by this Ohio and Indiana and Illinois country which he knows so well.

A complete account of Sherwood Anderson's achievement would require a discussion of his novels and poems and critical articles, but these do not concern us here, and a reader of *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of the Egg* will find that these two collections sufficiently indicate Mr. Anderson's purpose and measure the success of its fulfillment.

His short stories are studies in the sensitivity of a tired people stirring with the first hints of a new and freer life. They are feeling and testing little points of contact by thrusting forward spiritual antennæ timidly, but with infinite care, and they are more or less subconsciously relating these points of contact to one another and to themselves, little by little and by a process of trial and error. The errors far outnumber the correct in-

ferences, but errors are memorable experiences and more instructive often than successful intuitions. These people feel an obscure, but terrible desire for self-expression, and their attempts at expression are limited and frustrated by their religious symbols and by their conventional ethical and commercial codes. Business provides almost the only romantic escape from life, as Dreiser anticipated Anderson in pointing out, yet business with its emphasis on power rather than love is not an adequate spiritual outlet for all this pent-up energy. And so men and women are defeated by life and ashamed of their defeat, and deep down in their hearts they have a sense of injustice, and they want to know why.

Anderson's stories are all crises, yet indeterminate in their immediate significance as life always appears to be at the moment of incidence. Frequently he gives these crises no more outward emphasis than life gives them, but we are enabled to chart life's course backwards and forwards from the viewpoint of this observer, since we are not personally implicated in the tangle, and survey it with Anderson from a dispassionate, though perfectly sympathetic, distance.

Thoreau has remarked on some occasion that

"the great majority of men lead lives of quiet desperation." This sentence keeps recurring to my mind as I read these tales. Here we perceive life, rich blundering stupid life, unconscious of how to use its treasures, yet seeking ever for a meaning, and educing little by little a purpose and a goal from stray hints and fears and a little hope, seeking to transcend the obvious meaning which the environment forces upon it. And Anderson is one of his own people, pursuing the same end by the use of strange, and yet familiar, dusty words, adding them patiently and quietly to one another with significant calm, until the pattern which he had dimly foreseen begins to appear, the pattern for which he is willing to wait ever so quietly, masking his tremulous eagerness. He is satisfying his own need for expression by so doing, and ultimately fulfilling the obscure but terrible desires of his people. And we feel that he is a little ashamed, and this makes his work very human and near to us.

Anderson does not satisfy his desire, like so many other American writers, by portraying energy for its own sake, or by writing hymns to power, for such a satisfaction represents only a transitory fulfillment and brings its own reaction. Rather he

appears to be swimming upward and upward toward the light, content if he comes within sight of the first filtered gleam of the future, clouded and turbulent though it may be. One of his finest stories bears the significant title, *I Want to Know Why*, and in all the tales we find his characters repeating this phrase or its equivalent over and over in one form of action or another in their sterile loneliness and shame.

"Many tales come to sit for a few moments on the doorstep and then go away.
It is too cold for them outside.
The street before the door of the house of my mind is filled with tales.
They murmur and cry out, they are dying of cold and hunger.

"I am a helpless man—my hands tremble.
I should be sitting on a bench like a tailor.
I should be weaving warm cloth out of the threads of thought.
The tales should be clothed.
They are freezing on the doorstep of the house of my mind.

"I am a helpless man—my hands tremble.
I feel in the darkness but cannot find the doorknob.
I look out at a window.

Many tales are dying in the street before the house of my mind." [1]

And in *The Man in the Brown Coat*, Anderson says: "Already I have written three hundred, four hundred thousand words. Are there no words that lead into life? Some day I shall speak to myself. Some day I shall make a testament unto myself." [2] While *Seeds* is concluded by these words of Leroy: " 'I am weary and want to be made clean. I am a man covered by creeping crawling things. I would like to be dead and blown by the wind over limitless waters. . . . I want more than anything else in the world to be clean.' " [3]

All these words express the imprisoned sense of a people whom the machine has caught in its own way, which is by no means always an industrial way, and has molded to its will. It is tired of them now, and has thrown them aside. Yet they had relied upon it with a simple trust until they came to worship it, and they do not know what to do with their new empty freedom. They are afraid. I remember not long after the armistice meeting a number of English civilians who had

[1] *The Triumph of the Egg*, 1921, Introductory poem.
[2] Ibid. p. 101.
[3] *The Triumph of the Egg*, 1921, p. 32.

been released from Ruhleben, and how unhappy they all were at being forced by their new freedom to rule their own lives and to determine its course from day to day. More than one of them confessed to me that he had often thought of suicide during the long years of German imprisonment, yet they looked back to this life with regret and nostalgia simply because it had no responsibilities.

Well, it seems to me that Anderson's people are frequently like that. They are so vividly realized that we find ourselves calling them "people" rather than "characters," and their vividness is that of people who are brave and ashamed and afraid, and who have found life inscrutable till a moment's flash tells them something. Yet they are feeling their way always, groping for a meaning and groping for expression. And Sherwood Anderson is the instrument they use, Anderson who is looking for words, simple words to express their fears and their hopes too and his own hopes and fears. These people have set him looking for words that have a liberating power, and he is finding these words for them.

Rebecca West has remarked that "his characters are too often mere types of desire, unincarnated souls." But the essential thing is that they are

about to be born, and Sherwood Anderson's instinct here is profoundly right. We see them just before the birth of their souls, or even at the moment when they enter a world that has a meaning.

Anderson himself was reborn through his writing. What we know of his history has been told by Paul Rosenfeld, and the outline can be filled in from his novels if they are read with care and discrimination. "He grew in a corn-shipping town of post-Civil-War Ohio; grew among people who had forgotten the beauty laboriously accumulated in Europe; grew ignorant of the fact that beauty made by human toil existed anywhere on the globe. Around him, too, everything was quantity, not quality; everything urged to personal ambition. He lived the days lived by countless other smart little boys in that meager civilization; volunteered to fight Spain and typhoid in Cuba; spent the money gained in soldiering in acquiring a little education at a fresh-water college; worked in factories, in bicycle-foundries; set out, driven by the universal goad, to become a successful business man; did become a successful business man. . . . Towards his thirty-fifth year, he became sick of soul. He commenced to feel the state

in which he was living as filthy. . . . Sickness of soul took Anderson away from business. . . . At odd hours, after business, he began to write. And lo, in the process of writing, the old wound began to close. He commenced to touch people again. He commenced to enter into lives." [1]

And in entering other people's lives, he found the answer to his own perplexities and pains. "What in himself he feared, what he, the fearful rebel in the Yankee flock, thought his own most special insanity, his own pariah marking, that is suddenly perceived a universal trait, present everywhere. His loneliness, that he thought a desolation all his own, is sensed in a million tight, apart bodies. His boastfulness, lust, self-infatuation, his great weariness, promptings of the messianic delusion, despair, they are suddenly perceived everywhere; they, and not the outer mask that men wear in each other's blind sight, are seen the truth. . . . It is himself, Sherwood Anderson, the man who looks like a racing tout and a divine poet, like a movie-actor and a young priest, like a bartender, a business-man, a hayseed, a mama's boy, a satyr, and an old sit-by-the-stove. It is

[1] Paul Rosenfeld, in *The Dial,* January, 1922, pp. 31, 39, 40.

himself as his father and his mother, as the people who moved about him in Clyde, Ohio, in his childhood and moved away from him, the many thousand humble and garish lives he has touched, the men he has done business with, the women he has taken, have made him." [1]

This ordinary sensual man is impelled like Jacob to wrestle with his angel. He fails in the struggle, and fails again and again, and still fails triumphantly, and his faith is unconquerable. He has even conquered at the last his racial fear of the dark, of the unknown. He follows strange dim trails and he has no compass other than his faith. A little chance sign unregarded by any one else points a forgotten or unknown way to him which he follows through thick overgrown brush and swamps and across rushing torrents which sometimes carry him off his feet. But usually he recognizes the cross currents and then he stands stirred but unshaken, in the midst of them, measuring their force and direction. And he never forgets the way by which he has come, nor the experience which he has gained on his journey. And little by little he gives America an orientation. As he pauses at the end of the day, we know that

[1] Ibid pp. 34-35.

he is tired, but he smiles with pity that does not condescend, and he seeks to avoid self-pity. He never forgets in his writing that he exists and moves as a man in the same least common human denominator as the rest of his fellow-Americans.

His people are men and women who need to be loved and whom life has somehow passed by, and who are inarticulate. There is a great deal of petty detail in their lives, dull gray monotonous detail, but they cannot find the synthesis of it all. Then one day something breaks, and the man or the woman is free, or more often crushed. The subconscious mind of these people is continually struggling to reach the surface and to impose its dream upon life. It breaks through the frozen ground at last, and the end is either liberty or devastation.

These men and women, as Sherwood Anderson sees them, live in a world of unformulated, but keen, desires. They have a smoldering lust of the flesh and a smoldering lust for power, and the drab smoke of their choked desire suffocates their souls with undying longing. Then one day flashes the moment of combustion, and there is an instant of unchained dæmonic madness abroad in their hearts, and that madness either liberates or de-

stroys. For it is true also, as Blake and St. Francis knew, that whom the gods would *free*, they first make mad. The flame of this freed desire is an unbounded conflagration that transforms time into an eternal moment, sweeping all life with its fire and consuming the very soul.

English critics have said that Sherwood Anderson cannot create visually, and by this they mean that he does not offer us genre portraits of what is unique and individual in his surroundings. But life does not visually create in this land. Ohio has no genre portraits to offer us. And Anderson is too much of an artist to offer us false and sentimental quaintness. His fellow-writers have always been looking for the picturesque that is not there, and he has given his own rose-spectacles away to a boy he met outside a circus-tent.

When he looks at the life around him with his own eyes, he sees a great social compulsion that would make all alike, and this is the gray surface that he records. He tunnels for life under this surface and finds it; but we are unwilling or fearful to recognize our own image in what he finds. For in this subconscious world, our inner planet, life rides out a heavy gale with broken spars in the

night, surviving as by miracle only, and when dawn breaks there is a leaden sky.

I would emphasize the value of his spiritual intactness, and his own complete realization of that value in others. It is intimately related to his respect for life. Robert Graves said to me one night that a man who sought to impose his spiritual influence upon another man was Goliath. And Graves, who is David, was right, and Anderson also has realized this truth. It is the truth which makes us free, and freedom can never, of its very nature, be imposed upon another man. Anderson is uncovering the soul of America reverently, and liberating and curing it by giving it knowledge of itself. And so he would heal America, as he healed himself, by faithful discovery and impersonal compassion.

He has not completely achieved his ultimate style, though it is already a fine and subtle one for his purpose. Laboriously formed as it must have been, it has groped its way from depths, little by little upwards beyond surfaces. It is gnarled at first as all roots are, and cramped and huddled because it is crowded by the dank roots of all the other trees, and many worms have

gnawed it. And later it is poetry in snatches of sunlight, stark, simple wind-bitten poetry that bends to the gale.

Anderson chooses words for their grain, and he uses naught but good timber, well-seasoned and dry and toughened by exposure. These words are old and elemental utterances, whose ancient meaning voiced under the stars by wanderers whose ideals they were, have been long forgotten, except for a few rugged poets,—Whitman and Hardy and Doughty, and that is all. His stories are built by piling and joining together simple, homely, sweet-smelling, forgotten words. Little staccato hammer-strokes nail them together with all the joy of honest craftsmanship. They have the value of line rather than of color, for there is little color as yet perceived in his country, and they have no pretensions to be genteel like most of their neighbors. Their beauty is in their use, and they are built into little homes that wait for fires to be lit in them and songs to be sung by those fires.

It is perilous, indeed almost invariably fatal, to weigh a contemporary in the same scale as his predecessors who have won a fixed place in literature. I shall not therefore attempt to relate the work of Sherwood Anderson to that of Hawthorne

and Poe and Henry James, or to that of Balzac, or Maupassant, or Chekhov. I may record my belief that he ranks as a short-story writer with these artists, and time which laughs at critics may doubtless reverse my judgment. But a fine writer who is a man of his age may have a special significance for that age which is independent of time's final reckoning, and allowing all that we wish for the influence upon Anderson of the Russians and of Freud, of D. H. Lawrence and of Van Wyck Brooks, I think we may say that no short-story writer creating in English to-day is so representative and so revelatory of the age in which we live.

America is a chaos, and Sherwood Anderson is the artist who broods over the face of the waters. Later some other artist may reap the harvest, but it will be, after all, because the pioneer has cleared the ground and sown good seed and tended it, and perhaps died with his hope and his love quite unfulfilled.

I think we may trace a parallel path in the work of Waldo Frank. Although *City Block* is his only collection of short stories, we are justified in setting it not so very far below *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of the Egg,* and the distinguished body of Frank's other work, which includes three

remarkable novels and a critical study of American culture entitled *Our America*, warrants us in forecasting an achievement of great value to our literature. The aim toward which he is directing all his energies is to release the same forgotten power in eastern city life which Anderson would release in the little towns and on the farms of the Middle West. He wishes to interpret the dumb desires of his people to themselves, and to liberate their creative energies in a beautiful, frank, imaginative life.

At the close of his book, *Our America*, which ranks with the work of Van Wyck Brooks as one of the two best interpretations of our arrested spiritual growth, he has written these pregnant words: "Already two hundred years ago, American energy had become external: fled equally from the soil of the land and from the soul of man. We had no ancient tenancies to breed mellowness and contemplation. We had no fixed traditions upon which the soul could fall back and rest and gather strength. From the beginning we were a people centrifugal, nervous, impatient. No potential energy could store in us: we poured ourselves unendingly, pioneering and exploiting. The crisis finds us to-day, innerly depleted. We are clever. We are literate. We are materially advanced.

But, facing the mandate of our hour, the recreation of a world, we are more backward than the Magyar or the Slav, because we lack that spiritual substance which creates Faith and which moves mountains.

"This then is our task. Whitman foresaw it and sang of it and warned us. We must go through a period of static suffering, of inner cultivation. We must break our impotent habit of constant issuance into petty deed. We must begin to generate within ourselves the energy which is love of life. For that energy, to whatever form the mind consign it, is religious. Its act is creation. And in a dying world, creation is revolution." [1]

Hunger and Faith are the forces to stir this world that is dying of inanition; blind hunger, blind faith perhaps, dammed up in iron channels, but rusting the iron away, little flake after flake, until the torrent bursts clear in clean destruction. Then sunlight and freedom, and iron a thing of the past. So Frank sees the desperate dim struggle, and if he can promise no immediate heaven, he would have this life changed by the will of his people from a hell to a purgatory.

[1] p. 219.

One by one, they pass before us, these little men and women with vast desires: Godfrey Dunnimore Carter, the "bit of a man with a seven-syllabled name in the vastness New York"; Rudd, the carpenter man; Mr. Kandro, who wanted the eyes of Father Dennis for their color; Paolo Benati, who had no history but recalled the suns of his childhood; Sophia Breddan, who lay at the wheel's center, still; Esther and Meyer Lanich, under the gray of the dome; the White Man, the Black Woman, Christ, and John the Baptist; one by one they pass sadly under the roar of the Elevated trains. And all their channeled bodies and pulsing hearts are alive with a strange desire for a new world, the desire for a new world which brought them to New York, the desire for a new world in the flesh and the cream of the bones.

We perceived this life in a series of rapid staccato flashes, or sometimes as the discovery of health which the convalescent makes who sits in the warm sun and enjoys his hyperæsthesia. Waldo Frank's writing is still too deliberate, and we find him occasionally using beautiful words as an end rather than a means. But he sees very clearly what he desires to accomplish, and he cares tremendously for economy. I find him a little mes-

sianic at times, and in the past he has now and then sought for color in rhetoric, but it seems to me now that he is becoming more and more content to be less explicit and more implicit in giving us his message, and if he can sufficiently simplify what is mirrored in his experience, he may go as far as any artist who is writing in the world to-day.

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE CROSSWAYS

And now that we have journeyed so far, we find ourselves at the crossways. The signposts are confusing, and sometimes revolve in the wind. The inexperienced traveler without a compass may find that a board which claims to point toward the future is really directing him back in the fog toward the sentimental past from which he has come. Every prophet is a Cassandra, and I cannot hope to find much encouragement for my view of the future course of American short-story writing. But I look upon a chaos and welter of effort, and I see an industrial civilization ruled by the machines it has worshiped as gods. And I see here and there a man with a clearer view than his fellows who is creating little worlds for his dream of the future and shaping them concretely in simple words into homely familiar forms. And little by little these men are seeking a synthesis, trying to picture our age as it really is, with its virtues and vices, its strength and all its weakness. What

a Human Comedy the spectacle is, waiting for the Balzac of our time!

The synthesis, if it is ever achieved, will be achieved by a man who is gentle and serious and humorous and kind, but who flees from the sentimental and acknowledges the grimness and tragedy of the dusty American scene. We have had many and many a local messiah and many and many a village atheist, but these men have lacked humor, and saw no color in life save black and white. We are waiting, it seems to me, for a Don Quixote to laugh sentimental complacency away, and to go on a mad eternal quest for a clean hard human beauty of tragic and comic life.

The French have seen our highest artistic achievement of this generation in "Charlot," as Charlie Chaplin is known to the men and women and boys and girls of France. It is the detached Shakespearean humor of Charlie Chaplin, intimate yet inviolate and sad, that translated into the terms of the short story, may best reveal to America its soul. For we have an aged youth in us to-day that is a different thing from a young old age, and it is this aged and cynical youth which it must be the chief task of our artists to destroy. Let us keep our nonchalance. Yes. But let it be the non-

chalance of an indestructible faith, the nonchalance of a knight who rides on a holy quest.

And the faith of our writers must be a faith in life in its every form, a faith that finds beauty and hope in vagabonds and thieves and in all whom life has hurt and warped and shriveled into forms of spiritual ugliness and failure. It is because I believe in America and love it that I expect so much and judge it so severely. I will not admit that democracy is a failure, but only that it is lost in the chaos of rapid growth. The short-story writers are the destined interpreters of our own time to itself and to our children. Let them set out on their journey as poor modern Franciscans, and save America from the machine before it is completely enslaved.

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Note. A new anthology and critical work on the American Short Story announced by Alexander Jessup for publication in 1922 or 1923 promises to be the most exhaustive mine of material on the subject yet published. It will reproduce the text of seventy-five or eighty stories selected in such a way as to illustrate perfectly the course of the present history until it reaches our contemporaries.

A more extended general bibliography is to be found in the Cambridge History of American Literature. Special attention may also be called to the chapters on Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, Henry James, Mark Twain, and The Short Story.

CHAPTER II.—THE FORERUNNERS—IRVING, AUSTIN, AND OTHERS

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